A Yawoo Life.

By Geoffrey Clarke

With illustrations.

This Memoir is a work of fiction. Any similarity to events,characters or places in this book is either fictional, or the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons either dead or alive is purely unintentional.

There cannot be a fixed idea of a person's character. The atoms in our body change completely every few years. Therefore, we are not the same person now as we were then. We cannot extrapolate from one age to another. If we are politically correct today, we were not so then. It would be like asking why the Mond Nickel works in Landore at the site of the present Liberty Stadium dumped thousands of tonnes of disused metals and other detritus on the land.

Some friends have asked me why I call it a 'Yawoo' life. Yawoo is the way that Welsh people who drop their aitches pronounce Yahoo, is the only explanation that I can give.

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Chapter 1

Parents and Parties

''Yawoo, yawoo, wallahwallah wigwam! Tie him to the tree'', screamed the mud plastered ten year old Red Indian Knollabugs who had captured me, this seven year old whiteman Mellabug from the other end of the rural town. As they fired slender privet hedge arrows into my shins, I cried copiously. The breath stopped in my lungs as I realised that there were not always Mum and Dad around to save and protect.I shook with fear and trepidation waiting for the fatal arrow shot. The wooded coppice where the attack occurred was dark and overgrown. The nearby Catholic church quiet in its unresponsive vastnessand yet distant appeal as a refuge to which to run.

'Why are they attacking me? Maybe it's myleather school satchel with its dried up sandwiches, or perhaps they are just bandits?' I George, son of a local schoolteacher, wonder if it was a class privilege concern.

The gang of Yawoos stop for a short change of arrows which gives me the chance to breathe and think.

'What are they going to do next? Are they going to hurt me more? So far it's only my legs, but maybe they'll aim higher to my head and chest.'

I'm only dressed in my wartime issue khaki shorts with no underpants, grey flannel shirt with no socks, and just open sandals. This is the result of nineteen-forties' deprivation and the fag end of rationing. It gives me the chance to question why the son of a poor teacher and jaded housewife mother could be chosen for bullying. The school house was pristine, curtains in my bedroom would've been a luxury, and the post war standard of living very low – so why me?

There were some regional rivalries, sectarian or boundary based that caused their animosity. I knew that the town was already divided in terms of linguistic difference, Welsh versus English, and that there were before the deluge mods who hated chavs like me. Or could it have been their juvenile energies flowing with adrenaline and nowhere to go?

'You little jerk. You couldn't join our gang, you scruffy Mellabug. We're Knollabugs. We rule!'

Then after a few more moments,

'Shall we let him go, the ragged Mellabug from the wrong end of town?'

They fired a few more desultory shots, laughing out loud. Anyway, they turned and fired their last arrows, releasing me with some final whoops of pre-pubescent joy from the bully boy gang. Cut and bruised and cursing them under my breath, I limp home, legs running with blood, my face streaming tears. On reporting the incident to my Mum, Dot, she tells me to go and fight my own battles!

Leonard Jones was one of the cussed little devils who were shooting the arrows into my legs. He was the one whose family had one of the new fangled cat's whiskers wireless sets. They were rented, and the refreshed batteries were delivered by van weekly to keep them going, provided the rent was paid. Two shillings and sixpence a week, I think. Later, when grown up, he became a successful musician in a rock band touring Wales and beyond. He was a close mate of mine, but he always seemed to be distant as if he regarded me as an inferior type of person who couldn't match his spirit of adventure, fun and fancy freedoms. Of course, we were both dressed in the almost warn out shoes and clothes of the period due to the rationing and shortages. Our favourite tipple was dandelion and burdock that came in returnable bottles full of fizz and pop. It was like an early form of Coca Cola and tasted a bit like American root beer. Spanish root was another of our favourites. We could buy a stick of it for a farthing (one quarter of a penny) and suck it until it dried up into a shrivelled yellow twig, as we went our way to our single sex, segregated schoolroom. Some of the kids in my class in 1944 were without shoes; and it was always amusing that John Davies who lived in a dilapidated terraced house next door to the school was always late while we Yawoos coming down from Hillside were on time for class.

I bumped into Leonard again at a dance for young bloods when I was a young man in my twenties, and we shared our memories of gangs and pirates, Yawoos, and sand pit builders at an age when we could have been married men. It was perplexing to see someone who you had played with as a child with whom one had shared so many childish adventures and who was now a competitor for the eligible young ladies in our peer group.

Arthur Moody, the one who did the yawoo wallah wigwam Indian battle cry was a doctor's son from Windsor Road. Arthur was one of the boys who passed the scholarship exam and went on to be a prominent surgeon like his Dad. It was ironic that I used to play in his sand pit with him and other local children getting ourselves and especially our shoes into a mess, such that his mother would chide us for bringing sand into the drawing room with its grand piano and music stool. But the cucumber sandwiches and iced teas were a bonus that George particularly relished when he was feeling deprived of food. Dot always encouraged me to play at Moody's house, as if the cachet of association with a doctor's family was one that she relished.

Shortly after the arrows incident, returning from segregated, single sex Junior School, I saunter home taking the route through the woods rather than through Windsor Road, past the slaughter house, the Co-operative grocery store and up Coronation Street. Reaching the Knoll pond, it appeared to have been drained, so I decide in a moment of madness to cut straight across it rather than go around and pass the changing rooms for the swimming pool

section. As I run through the muddy recesses of the pond, I begin to sink further and further into the mud. Reaching my upper calves, I start to panic.

'Shall I turn back? No. Keep going, it's not far to the other bank'.

By now I am waistdeep in the mud, and wonder if I will be sucked down into a whirlpool of quicksand never to be found again or live to tell the tale. By some miracle I reach the other side and, covered in mud and sludge, hurry on to the schoolhouse for comfort.

My Dad,Perry, is fortunately at home when I run into the back kitchen and with his usual calm and practised hands stands me in the sink, washes me down saying,

'Never mind. You'll be alright in a while'.

And he kept me warm at the kitchen fire supplying me with the strong bottled coffee that he loved so much and that smelled so fine. Although I was glad he didn't mistake the gravy browning in the similar dark brown, unlabelled bottle for it this time. The kitchen where he welcomed me was next to the outdoor privy where newspaper served for tissues, and was always scented with the smoke from the indoor stove burning away on the local anthracite coal. Clean yet efficient, the kitchen was the hearth of a healthy, happy home that could endure such misadventures. The coal was cheap and plentiful, and you could always be sure of a warming at its cracked, browning, celluloid covered portholes that seemed to ooze a kind of bronze coloured melted gum from the fire resistant material.

Three generationsin this story live, love, exist and ride rough shod over time. Set in a number of countries, humorous emotions abound, scenes and backdrops take us from Glamorgan to Tehran, from Monmouthshire to Paris and Warsaw and from home base in Metropolitan cities to deserts in the Middle East. Each of us lives in a desert which contains a small human being; physically aware of his diminutive stature, tiny, microscopic, and minute.

May Hanbury, is born in a small, grey, back to back, terraced cottage in Glamorgan, which as some may know is not the best of starts in life for a family bound on a saga to cover three generations. It ends, or at least halts temporarily, in endless wealth and freedom. And May is the smart cookie in this tale.It was as cottages go, homely and clean, warm and secure, with a steep row of steps leading up from a village dominated by the pit to a dark brown door, lovingly painted by her father. He cannot enter the story, since he had so little to contribute to May's rich life pattern.She was much maligned by her arrogant, erstwhile father, John, who had no opinions, no thoughts, no guts, and no fame.

Whilst May was young she loved the hills of Monmouthshire. Especially the heather and the bilberry capped mountain tops, where she was once lost in a sudden mist so fierce that she feared she would never find home again. It started as thin, grisly stuff; but soon developed into pea-soup variety fog through steamy, cloudy mist to blanketing, all-embracing fog of the variety of smog so well-known to London in the fifties.

She eventually found her way down from the mountain-top by adhering to tiny rivulets of streaming springs which she knewwould lead down inexorably through the marshy, boggy area at the top, through the brooks at the back of her terraced cottage, to the river at the base of the basin where she resided.

May, however, showed from an early age a keen sense of intelligence, learning the hard way about life's flint hard messages. She culled from valleys and brooks, clouds and streams, and seemed to absorb her wisdom by a keen intelligence and a ready humour. I remember the way I bounded up those steps to be met by a dark, huge, yet kindly Alsatian named Rex. He had met his end when, blind, he'd rushed down the same flight of steps into the path of a heavy goods wagon laden with industrial materials, long since rendered unnecessary by the path of progress, like Rex.

May had that reverend, careful, sweet nature of a working girl, but what distinguished her from others was her voice : it gratinated - until those around her froze. Why her tone could have been so off putting to a small boy may have been its originality and unusualness, coupled with an accent so back guttural that it could have cut through steel. But her sweetness conquered all. Her generosity of emotion triumphed and her hearty companionability won all over. She was of the middle stature, towards blousiness really, for at seventeen she had had dough to rub, flour to sieve and pastry to roll as well as the next girl. Yet when it came to family life, May exhibited those qualities that made her so loved and respected by close family and friends, like Perry and Dot.

The cottage was a two up, two down miner's cottage with an outside lavatory and no inside running water. The miners would have to crack the ice on the outside tap before washing themselves in the morning before the early shift down at the pit. The front room was kept meticulous for visits from the vicar and the like. That was where the best furniture, linen and Swansea china,usually a flower patterned bowl and jug, and some delightful figurines in a glass cabinet, carefully stood on display for the attention of any admirers who cared to see them. The doorstep was highly scrubbed and kept clean by the housewife on a regular basis

There was the same, charming, endless air of sentiment in the raw there. On the landing there stood a melodious musical box that played the Jangling tunes that were contained in its rolls. I don't wish to imply that the boot blackened Dutch oven or the delightful, tuneful, acidulous tones of the mechanical musical box were what contributed to it. However, the heat of emotion was apparent to a small child of six, as I was then. Mixed irrevocably with the smell of cabbage cooking on the roaring coal stove (incidentally, a tonne of anthracite coal was delivered free to miners) and the pungent aroma of the floor polish. When the miners came home from their early morning shift by four o'clock, covered in grime and coal dust and stinking of sweat and toil, they would take a bath. Only the whites of their eyes were untouched by the coal dust and their clothes and body were totally covered with the results of eight hours underground hewing at the side of the coal face. The wife would wash the man's back in a tin bath normally hung up outside the kitchen door. In front of a raging fire, he would flannel off the grime and muck of his stinking occupation.

Returning to May, the young nurse, who was her contemporary, had that stout hippiness of the British nurse. She was built like a brick chicken house, really as a result of all the standing, I suppose, and she could go like a stuffed rabbit when it came to it. Dot herself, unfortunately, was at the worst end of a serious accident which occurred when, leaving her cycle parked at the top of a steep terraced street, she returned, after rain, to carry on to her next Queen's Nurses call. Finding the brakes inoperative, she careered on downhill until she dashed herself and her bike into the wall of the skin specialist's at the junction of Pantyfelyn Hill.

This event put paid to her career as a nurse for over a year and during this period she met Perry, the middle aged physiotherapist who had to tend daily to her rehabilitation. Dot had actually preferred another man she had met shortly before the accident, named Ted, but his lack of concern during her enforced idleness at Gwent General Hospitalled to the realisation of his inadequacy. Perry, however, the dogged, faithful type, met Dot out of hospital hours and soon cemented a regular relationship.

'Would you like to go to the pictures at Cardiff on Friday evening?' he asks commiseratingly.

'Yes, I'd love that.'

'Can Ted come too?'

'Of course', replies Perry, and off they go to the first local showing of Al Johnson's 'The Jazz Singer' the movie with a sound track, not just pictures.

Ted had no real interest for Dot since the bike crash.

'Sorry I couldn't come to see you' confessed Ted, lugubriously.

'That's no matter, I was well looked after.'

And so the relationship with Perry developed. He had to be prompted to ask her out to a café the following week, and had to be encouraged all the way along the line.

'Perry, why don't we go to Bindles on Barry Island on Sunday?'

'Alright, I could get some time off from the hospital on a Sunday afternoon, I suppose.'

'Well, we could always go for a walk along the beach...'

'No, that's alright. Dancing will be fine.'

The tea dances at Bindles were the highlight of the social calendar. They did the 'Black Bottom' with puritanical reserve and followed up with 'Saratoga Rag' to the restrained airs of Syd Sylvester and his ballroom orchestra. No one could say that the young generation of working couples in that part of the world were either abandoned or exotic.

'Having fun?' Dot enquires.

'Yes, thanks…' he adds, with no real enthusiasm.

'Let's leave early and take that walk along the beach.'

So they walk outside into the cool evening air and slip onto the esplanade for a romantic, moonlit stroll.

'It's a lovely evening.'

'Yes, I'm sure you are enjoying it.'

But Dot had longings for a more florid and tempestuous affair.However, Perry was stolidly loyal and needed no prompting to suggest a further excursion the following week.

‘Let’s take the train up to Mountain Ash station and walk on the mountain’, he suggests.

‘That would be ravishing’, gushes Dot, not seeing the pun, and bites back her desires for concerts, operas and cinemas.

The walk turns out to be pleasant, relaxing and without incident. It isn’t very long before the conversation turns to the subject of a more permanent future. But it has to be remembered that the times were not easy and, even for a man over thirty-five, with alittle capital, it would be tough to find a place to live and have enough money to make a secure home.

The years that follow remain long -lasting months of hard saving and long suffering economies in order to obtain the deposit on a house. Perry worked evenings as a prison service physio to earn extra money and Dot went back to her nursing. The announcement of the engagement, after seven years of steady, regular courtship in the old manner, went into the local paper. The marriage takes place in a tinny church near Cardiff on the eve of the second world war.

Perry, his age against him, gets turned down for military service and spends the war years as an ARP and school physiotherapist. The marriage turns out to be happy and uneventful and a child is born to the couple in the early months of the war at a makeshift hospital in barrack buildings at Bridge Road.

My earliest (repressed) memory is reported to be that I walk up Cimla Hill on foot at the age of fifteen months to reach the school house at the top when the family moves from Ponty to Cimla. I suppose my first real memories must be of sitting up in a pram in the garden of that suburban home and of long hours spent in the snow and wind despite all weathers. Mother was a fanatic for the current child- rearing theories of fresh air, sun and sleep.

A steel table had been delivered to the oddly red painted front room of the school house for protection from bombs that were potentially to fall from German aircraft on their way to a blitzkrieg on the nearby docks of Port Margam. That was me, during one of the frequent power outages, diving under the table screaming and moaning:

‘Mummy, Mummy. Are the Germans coming?’

‘Finish your homework by the candlelight’ was my Mum’s cool response.

Sometime later, Perry took me aged twenty months up to the fields overlooking the schoolhouse and pointed west towards the red flame filled skies above the port that had been repeatedly bombed over three nights by the German Luftwaffe.

‘Look. Look, son, Swansea’s burning!’

Swansea was bombed for three consecutive nights. Only London and Swansea suffered bombing on three nights in a row. The centre of the city around the Plaza cinema were mounds of rubble and debris. They were bulldozed away making an impassable barrier into Henrietta Street from the Kingsway down to St Helen’s Road. Even in the ‘fifties the bomb site hadn’t been cleared and it was an appalling reminder of the horrors of war. Why the Germans decided to bomb Swansea is not sure, but one of the intentions of the enemy was to demoralise the population. According to Geoff Brooks, the sirens went off at 7.32 p.m.

on Wednesday, 19 February 1941. The populace were only expecting a night raid, but it continued for over three hours on each of the nights with eighty planes involved. Fifty-six thousand incendiary bombs were unleashed onto the city. One thousand two hundred high explosives were sent crashing to the ground by the bomb aimers. The destruction around the port was less than that in the city centre, as if the bombs actually missed their target. Weaver's Flour Mill on the dockside was their target site – a huge monolith structure made from reinforced concrete. There were parachute flares and fire bombs. The whole place was lit up and visible from our home eight miles away.

The rationing of food during the Second World War meant we were kept on a pretty tight shopping budget with four ounces of fat, four ounces of meat and a corresponding limit on items like cheese and butter. But the schoolhouse has an ample garden and the family gather red currants, raspberries, gooseberries, peas, beans and the like. My sister, Jane Marie, would scuttle along the rows eating fruit and veg as she went along. Blackberries were the highlight, and we would scour the fields, when they were in season, picking copious amounts of the luscious fruits that Mum would convert into jams, stews, pies and tarts.

She would roll out her pastry on a wooden board with awooden rolling pin. Ever frugal, she would chop off the ends of the pastry on the pie dish and keep it for later. She would never tell me when she knew the baking was ready. But I supposed it was by her sense of smell in that hot kitchen atmosphere. One of her secrets was to put a broken, Chinese patterned cup under the top layer of pastry to stop it from sinking. She'd add a topping of milk to the pastry, to prevent it from burning in those last vital minutes, when she was assessing the readiness of the cooking. These tarts and pies were the delight of Perry, who had the disconcerting habit of spitting out those tiny, pesky blackberry seeds that had become lodged in his teeth.

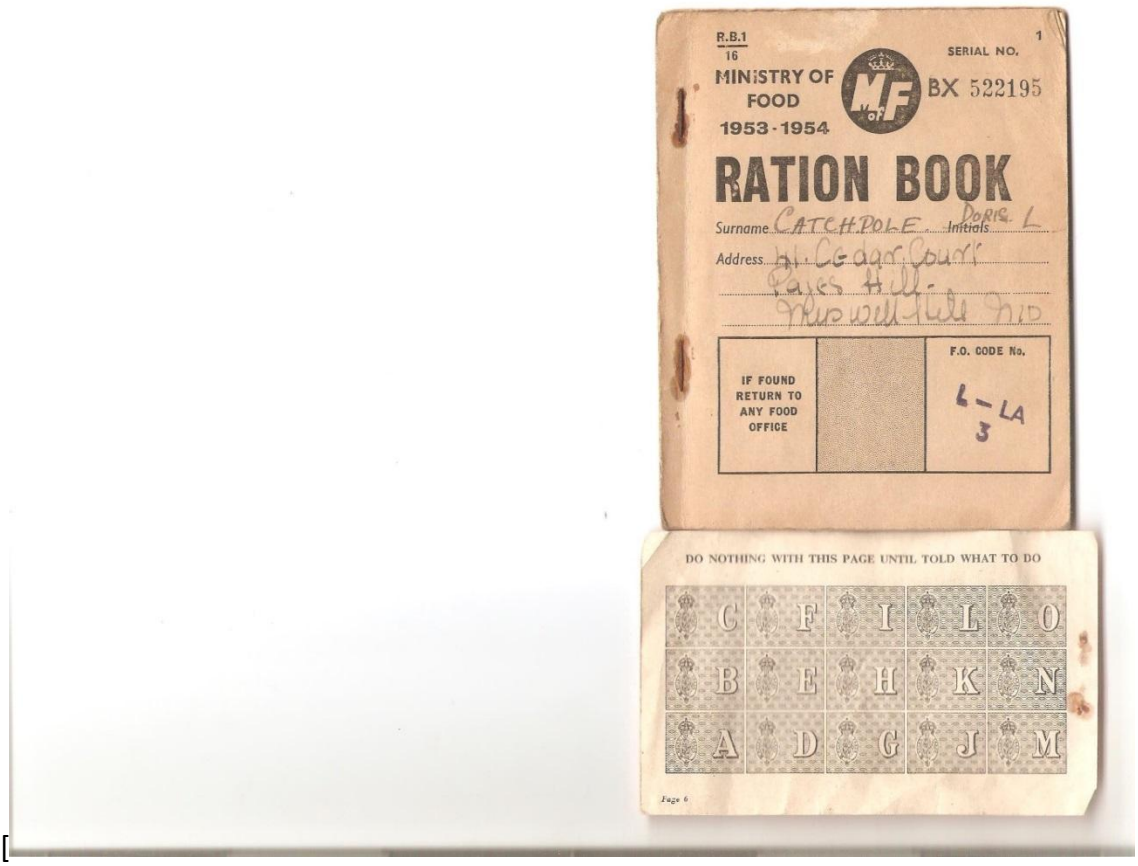

Figure 1 My Aunty Doris's ration book.

It's funny how the proclivity to accidents seems to run in families. Looking out of the sitting room window, suddenly I see Jane Marie hurtling down the slope outside the schoolhouse on her three wheeled contraption, a trike. She Is out of control. She's screaming blue murder, and I rush out the front door to see if I can help.

'What happened, Jane?'

'I don't know' she says, tears streaming down her face, blood pouring from her knee. 'It isn't my fault. The brakes don't work'.

Like mother, like daughter.

Anyway, Mum's a nurse and she cleans her up with the usual warm water with a measured, economical dose of Dettol.

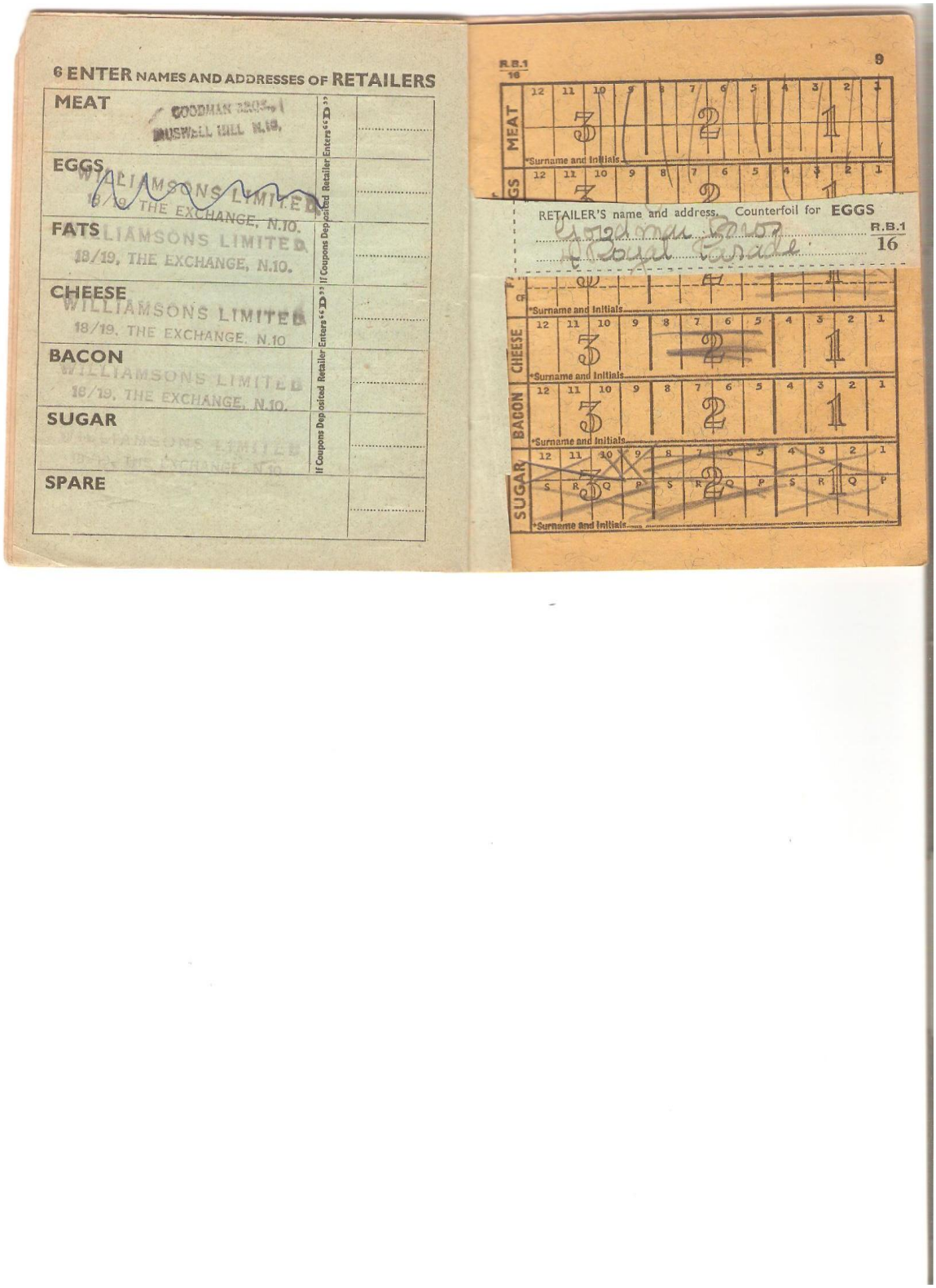

Figure 2 Note the allowances used up for each portion.

My father, Perry was a saintly chap. He never argued, but somehow always got his own way. He subtly managed Dot by a superior intellect, wisdom and native cunning. For example, he liked strong tea, so on pouring out it would be:

'You first, Dot, have your cup of tea before me.'

And he would thereby end up with the stronger one. But if Perry wanted something he would get it by patient waiting and dogged determination to be the one to prevail, but Dot didn't seem to notice that he always ended up winning. His self composure was remarkable perhaps due to his earlier background in mining electrics where safety and self command underground were paramount. He was what you might call a man with not a hair out of place, and who commanded respect by his modesty, good humour and constant pleasantness.

'Do you believe we may see the end of the war soon' he puts to Dot, naively.

'Well, depends who bombs whom the most, I suppose.'

'Don't think it will last beyond 1940', he says.

Nipper was fighting of course, at least in the Educational Corps as agym instructor. Nipper, Perry's cousin, agile, wiry and handsome with muscles to match appeared to be the equivalent of a modern - day American wrestler - the charisma much the same. He and Perry could and would vault over any five-bar gate with ease; hop, step and jumping, then placing the whole forearm on the top bar and vaulting up and over like a ballet dancer.

Come 1945, and me now nearing six years, I experience the first major traumatic event in my life. I can clearly recall at the end of the war reading (for I could read newspaper headlines at the age of four), that Japan had surrendered after the horrors of the mushroom cloud. The paper boy had tossed the newspaper into the front garden that afternoon, and I vividly see in my mind's eye a picture of a large, bulbous balloon of smoke and dust, the relevance of which I really didn't quite understand.

The press-picture of the Hiroshima mushroom cloud that signalled the end of WW II was an appalling and inexplicable image for a young child's mind to comprehend. It was a cataclysmic event that put an end to the second world war, but the loss of life, health concerns and appalling radiation problems persist to this day in Japan. However, I ran up the grass bank to a front door lovingly polished by Dot. Nearby bushes of wisteria and fuchsia seemed as magical as anything I had yet seen in my early life. Apart from a small accident with a radio which followed a long loving bath attended by mother, there was little to worry about.

'The gurgles in the bathroom wall
Are heard, but never seen at all
Who put the water in the taps?
The most industrious, little chaps'

she would recite, and regale me with tales of Bluebeard and his seven wives, and how he murdered his first wife. Was there any subtext there, I wonder?

I come downstairs wrapped in towels. I open the door. The flex of the wireless is loosely strewn across the corner of the room. I run across to listen to another exciting episode of '*Dick Barton: Special Agent*'. I trip over and break the radio. A piece of Bakelite is lying on the floor. It smelled strangely chemical and cloying. *Dun darun darun durun* went the theme tune of Dick Barton always at 6.45 p. m. after which it was bedtime. Exciting episodes with Jock Anderson and Snowy White as his mates and companions. There were a

total of 711 episodes with maximum audiences of 15 million. Its end was marked by a leading article in 'The Times'. It excited me for adventure, travel, and stories of derring-do, which might account for some of my more nefarious activities to be recounted in this book. The radio play recounted the adventures of ex-commando captain Richard Barton MC who, solved all kinds of crimes, escaped from dangerous spots and saved the UK from disaster time and time over.

Commenting on the broken Bakelite cover of the valve operated wireless, 'Never mind' coos Dot, but Perry turns a little edgy and raises his voice manfully at me,who, as delicate as a soap bubble from his bath, cries miserably. As a physical specimen Perry was outstanding, handsome and Russian looking, probably the result of ancestors like Count Leo Tolstoy, Warren Buffet and Alexander Hamilton, the founding father of the USA, according to our DNA. He was very hairy and olive skinned. His hair Bryllcreamed, sleeked back and centre-parted. He had a nobility and bearing that people took to be foreign, yet he was steeped in English forebears like Lippiatt his mother, Gould, his grandfather, and his grandmother née Bartlett; proud stock emanating from Wiltshire and Somerset. Yet, period photos of the time do seem to mark him out as having a swarthy foreign complexion. His accent was pure Rhondda, for he would pronounce 'whole' as 'whool' and reservoir as 'reservoy'. It was always accentuated on the final syllable like the 'p' in trip.

'Drat it, Perry. Can't you organise the electrical stuff in this house' barks Dot.

'Doh', for that's what he called her in tighter moments,

'For the sake of peace, I shall'.

Surely enough Perry carefully, methodically changes the electrical wiring with his horny hands exacting a penalty from contact with electrical tape and shorn cable. When he pushes it down the edges of the carpet, it buries itself.

'Perry. I know it's late, but let's for God's sake do something about this lighting', she nags on.

Dot was shorter than her other cousins, one of whom, Marjorie, is still alive as I write in 2015 at the age of 94. She was busty and well proportioned, bossy and highly efficient as a housewife, district nurse, and later Matron of a large care home. She possessed violet coloured eyes and brown tawny hair and sheer white skin, altogether different from Perry. Always maintaining pretensions, even though we were as poor as church mice, Dot had an elegance and an unparalleled dress sense. Her favourite maxim was

Blue and green should never be seen
Except upon a Fairy Queen.

When dawn broke on this quarrel, I find myself ready for action. But the war is a long, red – skied image, not a reality.

There were street parties to mark VE (Victory in Europe) Day. My speciality was the eating of the marzipan layer of the cakes that other kids didn't like. I could get down about five helpings without being sick. We sat in rows out in the street faced with jelly, custard, cakes and lots of 'pop'- fizzy drinks that we got in returnable glass bottles that rewarded you tuppence (about 5p.) when you took them back. We were recyclists, too.

On one street party day, probably for VJ (Victory in Japan) Day, it came on to rain and Mum spiritedly invited everyone back to the schoolhouse. There were people in the bedrooms, in the kitchen, and the sitting room was jam packed. There was a camaraderie and trustfulness around in those days.

After a short interval when I don't remember much apart from begging 'A Penny for the Guy', for bonfire night, me and my pal Leonard run away from home

'Throw the rubber boats over the wall,' says Leonard.

I count on his co-operation to climb over the broken-glass and barbed wire topped wall to escape from our first juvenile crime. We are on an escape from home, and imagine ourselves as pirates, robbers and thieves. We'd climbed over a high brick wall to get into a storage place.

'Hey! What's going on? You rascals!'

Fearing capture by the other pirates, I run on down by the side of the canal, halting neither to catch breath or to turn around and look for our pursuers.I return home dirty, dishevelled, tired but happy after running away for the day.

A childhood spent in poor surroundings with a war on tends to breed an attitude of boredom and resentment. It wasn't until I reach the Grammar school that I begin to feel the chance of escape to better and brighter things. No inside toilets being available then, it would be gruesome of a night, when cold in bed, and wanting to go for a pee, I'd have to climb downstairs and go out into the back garden in all kinds of weather: thunderstorms crashing overhead with frightening intensity, lightening, noise, rain and snow included. After finishing there was often no lavatory paper or sometimes not even newspaper to clean up. If I remember correctly, it was a case of finding some straw or even grass and leaves, and then the trek back to my cold curtain less bedroom.

It is at this point in the story that we return to May Hanbury, for she and Jack, an apprenticed lad, had married at the same time as Dot and Perry and had produced a daughter, Elizabeth and a son Rob. The world being what it is, meand Eliza were kissing cousins, and the friendship between me and Rob took off into the second generation. And eventually eventhe third generation. This not unlikely relationship was made possible by the proximity of May and Jack's newsagent's business at Stockham's Corner and the fact that me and Liz attended the same Church school since her parents, too, had stayed in the area.

Elizabeth had really impressed me in school with her essay entitled: *'Behind the Green Door*.'

'What did you imagine to complete the story, Liz?'

'Oh, it was about rhinestone covered technophiles performing musical wonders in digital puppetry, the magic mountain where tempests raged, and where piano playing minstrels roamed the grassy fields.'

She had a brilliance and dynamism that appealed to me, and though a year older, made me want to be her boyfriend. I used to grab her tits and try to kiss her in at the top of the stairs while the parents were in the sitting room downstairs.

'No, No, I'm older than you. Find someone your own age', she would retort.

The twins, Mary and Rita, the daughters of a local fitter, and a few years older than me, were my first romantic interest. We tried to ride big, adult sized bikes, for there were no kids' bikes then, and invariably the girls would tease me about my lack of skills.

'Come up the fields with me' whispered Rita.

'OK. What for?' I reply, innocently.

'You'll see' she rejoins, giggling.

Up the top field near the Baglan forest, where there is nothing between us and the clouds, she lies down on the grass, and pulling up her skirt invites me to do what I want. At that young age, I don't realise what I am supposed to do, and only manage to rub my limp cock along the top of her thighs. Lying on top of a girl for the first time is an extraordinarily worrying and perplexing experiment for a pre-pubescent child.

'Make it hard and long for me. Give me a baby.'

I still don't know what I have to do.

'Yes, yes ,yes, yessss' Oh. I like that… 'she murmurs.

'O K. Right. Let's go back then.'

And I hurry away, after my first inconclusive sexual experience.

Chapter 2

Failures and Futures

Scholarship day approaches. And I am led to believe there will be a new bike and all sorts of kudos for me. If I pass the entrance test for the grammar school. Apparently, kids who get through the exam become solicitors, barristers, doctors and the like. Those who don't are relegated to become workers on the tools, or delivery drivers and such. No thought is given to their possible happiness or satisfaction in life. On the fateful day, the excitement builds in the morning.

'Don't forget to do your best'

'OK Mum, I will'

'You'll get a new bike if you pass.

'OK then, Mum'

I rush off to school in a fever of heightened anticipation, agitation and distress at the prospect of failing.

The first paper is Maths, my weakest subject.

I get confused with some of the arithmetic. I am excited, worried about failing. I cannot really get out of this emotional state. But I somehow reach Question 9.'Below is a diagram of a fireplace which is in the shape of a 5ft.square with the space for the grate a 2ft. square. What is the area of the shaded part?'

Wow. So I multiply thelength of the fireplace with the breadth (It's a square, right?) five times five equals twenty five. I subtract the four square foot from it and get twenty-one. Easy. Next question…

However, come the afternoon session and it's English, my favourite. I thought I would do well. I'm still thinking more about where I'll go on my shiny new bike.

The usual grammar questions are a bit tricky, but I do OK. Then comes the comprehension test.I'm sweating, confused and angry. How would I know this? It's an extract from John Buchan's '*Greenmantle*'. All I can remember now is this passage:

'It was Mrs Jimson who received me as I descended from the station fly…. a large red woman with hair bleached by constant exposure to weather, clad in a gown which both in shape and material, seemed to have been modelled on a chintz curtain.'

Question 1 is ‘What is ‘the station fly?’’ I know what a fly is – an insect. But it couldn’t have been that. So I answer ‘I don’t know’.

I have no idea what a gown is. Perhaps it is a frock, but I’m not sure, so I write ‘I don’t know’.

I‘venever heard of ‘a chintz curtain’ and anyway we didn’t have any curtains in my house, so I guess ‘A special kind of curtain.’The results come out later in school. ‘Those who have passed to the grammar school sit on the floor at the front’ the teacher says.

The teacher calls out the names. The best kids move forward. My name is not called out.

‘What? I’ve failed? Never! It can’t be true.’I’m dismayed, troubled, worried and most of all shocked.

My Dad goes down the school to find out what happened. I was in the top six in class, for goodness sake. Apparently, my name is the very last on the list of one hundred and twenty pupils in the town who have passed. But only a certain quota can qualify to go to the grammar school this year. Mr Bryant, the head teacher, explains that I and the rest can resit the exam again. But we are soon to leave, because Mum and Dad are taking up a residential post at an orphanage in another town far from here.

‘Maybe George could live with Aunty Myfannwy on the farm and try again from there’, thinks Mum. But it isn’t to be. And we all jump in the removal van to Swansea with Mike Henwood, the driver, and arrive to start our new life with me,bikeless, back in Junior School.

Dot and Perry revolutionise the care home. They change it from a Late-Victorian institution. They ate lentil soup and ladled-out rice pudding in dark Dickensian kitchens. There are outside earth privies for toilets, and no bathrooms. Mum and Dad, with the help of a modernising Children’s Department run by Margaret Collins (Miss Collins), make it a modern family unit. The kids are taken out shopping for their individual clothing and leather sandals. They turn it into a happy, fun based cottage home. It now has en suite bathrooms, individual rooms for every kid, proper fire escapes and security.

Each foster mother in the social unit would encourage and share her love with the children in her care. We all go on holidays to Ilfracombe. We take the paddle steamer ‘The Halcyon’ from Mumbles Pier across the wild Bristol Channel and love every minute in the bracing, open air. We exchange houses with a Home in Fishponds, Bristol. I explore the ‘dumb waiter’ in the dining room, pulling the rope up and down with me travelling inside. Bus trips to the city centre are made exciting by Dad, who says that the petty cash money he’s carrying has to be referred to as ‘the sandwiches’not to attract attention.Other excursions are to Pembroke Dock, Fishguard and St David’s in Pembrokeshire.

The children go out to local schools and hopefully are able to integrate into the community without being regarded as ‘from the Cottage Homes’. Subsequent developments have reduced the size of such units, making it easier for us to mix in. The idea is that the cottage homes are too large and still remain similar to institutions. Rather than unidentifiable places in the community.

But suddenly I look around and discover that I have lost my parents. I am an orphan, too. They now belong to sixty other kids who they love more than they do me and Jane. Being brought up like an orphan is an interesting experience.

'Eat your afternoon tea, George!' says Mrs Willkie, the foster mother. If you don't grab the first piece of bread and butter on the table you won't get any to eat. Living among the kids at the outstation in Mumbles Road means that I get to attend a fairly decent school – Oystermouth Secondary. But it arises that I get to empathise and connect emotionally with my pals. Most of them have lost parents, are orphaned, or perhaps put in a home, because of economic or drink related problems. I am glad to get away from the local secondarymodern. The only activity there seemed to be following football teams. And mine is allocated to be the Spurs at White Hart Lane. I am taught about their white strip when I'm thirsting for Latin, Algebra and Science.

The following years are spent trout fishing in streams. I learn the art of casting a fly and all the varieties of lures available. I get my practice in Cockett pond, where the minnows and tiddlers are my first prize. Surprising that, all alone, I don't fall in and drown. Cockett pond was extremely deep with cliff - like sides and treacherous muddy banks. As I stooped over, alone, to catch my newts and tadpoles in a borrowed jam jar there was an imminent threat of drowning, and George had heard of a case of someone who had fallen in and, getting cramp from the cold, icy water, had been lost. The other dangers were from gases escaping to the surface rising from old mining works which were capable of asphyxiating someone on the nearby banks. Anyway, I trekked home to the orphanage with my prized catch of pond fauna. I suppose it's part of progress that the pond is now filled in and that housing has been built above on the scruffy area that abuts the railway line to Llanelli.

Fishing off Mumbles at high tide is a great delight. It provides me with a view right across to Devonshire. I like seeing the oil tankers out in the bay, and the way the majestic land mass is so carved out by nature. One can see the tower of the Guildhall and the round Community Centre building on the top of Greenhill. The houses of the town stand out in their higgledy piggedly symmetry. Mumbles Head has a lighthouse and (now newly rebuilt) lifeboat house. The fog warning flashes out its coded message - three long one short: three long…

Langland Bay is pure delight. Canoeing is a sport for anyone with a canoe. It was a fairly recent development as with growing affluence in the nineteen – fifties families, or at least some sections of the middle classes, could afford such luxuries. We tie them up on the top of the foreshore just above the pebbled part of the beach by the café. Going for a trip with Brian around the Mumbles Head is an exciting and perhaps dangerous adventure for two teenage lads. Me, I paddle at the back and Bri' steers at the front.

'Don't go too far out to sea' I caution nervously.

Brian feels far more confident than I do. I imagine a giant wave heading laterally towards us, turning us over and, clinging to the wreckage, we'd have to propel our lively craft back to the shore with our legs kicking out violently in the sea water. Bri' reminds me that it's just a lovely Summer's day in Mumbles and it would be most unlikely to happen. I can't get used to the endless pitching and rolling of the boat, the translucent eddies and flows of the quickening current and feel seasick, apprehensive and frankly scared. But we go on round

the head, seeing the two islands like two mammaries, mummeries, mumblies, mumbles? that are cut off at high water. We reach the pier. Then, waving to the passengers on the 'SS Waverley', we turn back. We arrive safely, surfing in majestically on a wave then jumping out into the waist - high water to steady the canoe and return it to its resting place above the beach.

We are lucky enough to win a lottery draw for one of the chalets at Langland. That means we can now go down every weekend and have marvellous picnics, swim all day, and play tennis at the courts behind the chalets. We sunbathe and attend for high tea in the Langland Bay hotel. We walk over the cliff up to Rotherslade and buy lollies and candy floss at the concrete monstrosity built to hold up the crumbling sand. We spend holidays at a monthly rented house on the promontory nearby. And my speciality is making rock pools with my cousin David Gittins. Aunt Doris, down from London, (whose ration book is pictured) takes pictures with her 'Brownie' camera.

The circus is in town. We play rugby on the Oystermouth Road Recreation ground. It is now the car park for the Ospreys Rugby stadium. The elephants are quartered in the middle of the pitch. Each Wednesday afternoon, we have sports at the rec' ground. The following week, tackling the opposing team and landing in the elephant cow pats is a disturbing and unpleasant experience.

Playing away from home, we have an extra player surplus to our numbers. We loan him to the home team. We are playing on the typical Welsh sloping field and we are facing uphill. I'm playing wing three-quarter. Denzil, our player, is running down the hill. I run in for the tackle bending low and ready to fling my arms around his thrusting thighs. He catches me with his knee in the middle of my forehead. I am knocked out cold. I carry on playing after a cold compress is applied to my face. No blood bins in those days!

Mr Elias, the headmaster, had the intriguing ability to predict examination questions. 'Now boys and girls.What will you get in the exam? Let me think', he says putting his hand mockingly to his brow. 'Yes… Henry the Eighth... How many wives? Six. Catherine, Ann, Jane, Ann, Catherine, Catherine. Divorced. Beheaded. Died. Divorced. Beheaded. Survived. The Tudor reign… Mary and Elizabeth. Who was put in The Tower..? Mary.' We go home for the weekend and swot it up, parrot fashion. Come Monday, the questions are, sure enough, identical. There were no locked cupboards for exam papers in those days. Or, the head had an uncanny ability to know exactly what questions the syllabus required. We all sail through.

Now I get to go to real grammar school. Not that Dumbarton is bad. After all, it produced Catherine Zeta Jones. With five GCE (sic) 'O' levels under my belt, I move on to year twelve at Dynevor Secondary Grammar in Delabeche Road. A training in using the brain rationally is on offer at the sixth form. Bunny concentrated on our writing skills and honed them into acute analysis using facts, dates and ideas. Brynley ('from the Latin') would lick his lips and then expound for minutes on Palgrave's Golden Treasury of English Verse. (It's an iambic pentameter, he would explain.) Bennet gives us a love of Wordsworth. His analysis of the nature poems deepens our understanding of the effect a vernal wood could have on a solitary man who could imbibe its messages.

With ‘Top Cat’ we enjoyed Racine, Maupassant and Balzac. We translated freely and learned French poetry by heart, ‘Ainsi, toujours pousse vers de nouveaux rivages’. And discovered in ‘Father Goriot’ how a parent could be driven to penury by the parasitical behaviour of his upcoming daughter. He borrows at interest to provide her with the luxuries she craves. He goes without food and every necessity to pay the money back to his creditors. He dies in abject poverty.

In Maupassant’s ‘The Necklace’ a wife spends thousands of francs for a diamond necklace. She wears it to a ball and then loses it. She buys another as a replacement, obtaining the money by borrowing from her friends. And it turns out to have been made of paste. I didn’t apprehend the venality of man and the possibilities for corruption of purpose then.

Our classroom is conveniently next to the ancient Albert Hall cinema where we could debunk during library periods. One wet Thursday afternoon, I watch ‘Only Two Can Play’ with Peter Sellers and Mai Zetterling. It is based on the novel by Swansea university’s Kingsley Amis. Filmed on location in Swansea, there’s even a glimpse of the cottage homes in the background of one scene where Sellers and Mai Zettterling are driving along Cockett Road up to Townhill in an open convertible. The taxi firm, Glamtax, is the one that provides the taxis for the outdoor scenes. Later, I do my holiday jobs with them as a driver. Mai Zetterling, with an alluring show of her legs, alights from the taxi to meet the sexually deprived librarian, played inimically by Sellers. John Lewis is portrayed as dull and bored. He has a stifling home life. The excitement of meeting the attractive Norwegian wife of a local business magnate could help him in his career ambitions. The plot develops along amusing and socially perceptive lines. Especially about suburban life in Swansea.

Our school produces Harry Secombe, the lovable goon, Mr Neddie Seegoon of the Goon Show. (‘He’s fallen in da water…’ ‘Wat key, Neddie?’ ‘Jayne Mansfield’s on fire, folks!’ ‘Did you put her out?’ ‘No. The man next to her.’) An amazing tenor voice, reared in the chapels of Bethesda, Bethany and Calvaria. He has a strikingly successful career in show business. Harry goes on to an all-time record of musicals with ’Oliver!’ many films and songs, especially the huge hit, ’If I Ruled the World’. His career reaches a loving and adored apogee in Sunday evenings’ ‘Songs of Praise’. It is little known that his charitable giving in the area made him the true Christian that his school and family wanted him to become.

Talking about Christians, an intellectual giant, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams used to be a pupil at Dynevor. He is a powerful voice for world peace and reconciliation. An impressive theologian, speaker and writer. He managed to get a hearing at Westminster and everywhere else for his ideas on toleration and cross faith understanding. His activities in Southern Sudan may not come to as much notice. He brings to light the atrocities there. It has been a crime of this century that his outspokenness has caused the capitalists who run our world to squeeze him out. Now Dean of Magdalene College. His voice is still being heard.

We were the ‘skiffle’ generation. With a double bass made from a tea chest, a broom handle and a length of string, we make music. Me on an old kettle drum and one of my schoolmates on his guitar, we mimic the Lonnie Donnegan’’Rock Island Line’ tunes fashionable at the time. The hobbies exhibition is held in the school gym to the consternation of Budgie, the sports master. It allows many learners to show their skills in stamp collecting, ornithology, birds’ eggs collections, scientific experiments and so forth.

The Spencer Davis Group came out of this melting pot of the talents. Spencer Davis made a number of very successful pop records on organ, guitar and vocals. 'Keep on Running' is a Number One and his albums, 'It's Been So Long' and 'Mousetrap' sold some copies.The school has produced professors, broadcasters, musicians, artists, scientists, business men,lorry drivers, the unemployed, and similarly members of the House of Lords.
The school organises an exchange visit to Germany. We set off by train from Swansea High Street Station. Mr Griffiths insists that we safety-pin our passports in the inside pocket of our regulation uniform jackets. A habit that has stayed with me on my travels to this day. George is allocated to a family in Backnang near Stuttgart. It turns out that a chav like me gets to stay with a millionaire industrialist's family. They manufacture railway engines and steam rollers. Dad has a massive Merc and we drive down the autobahns – he with a large Havana cigar in his mouth – at speeds I'd never before experienced in my life. Son Carl Reiner takes me to go water skiing at their log cabin in the Black Forest near the Bodensee Lake. That's me surging through the water trying to stay upright. I try to remember that I'm on an international exchange visit to promote harmony, reconciliation and hope to British and German families. The war is a still recent memory. Dresden, Cologne, Duisburg and the Ruhr towns had been severely carpet bombed by the Allies. Germany is still occupied by the Russian, American and British forces. We're the new generation. We must never do it again. But I digress…

That night at the log cabin, we are awakened by an almighty thunder and lightning storm with terrifying winds and a gale so severe the cabin roof is bending. The sound of the crashing thunder is the loudest sound I have ever heard in my short life. We chat and tell jokes in my rudimentary German:

'Lehrer zum Schüler': 'Für diese Frechheit schreibst Du hundert Mal, 'Ich bin ein fauler Kerl' und lässtes anschließend von Deinem Vater unterschreiben!' (Teacher to pupil: 'For this cheek you must write one hundred times, 'I am a lazy guy 'and by your father it can then be signed.')

The following year we return to Stuttgart in a convoy of two cars. Bri' in his Dad's Ford Anglia with me and Handel, and Col' and Dudley in his MG sports. We take in the Nurnberg Ring with me driving at 120 mph around the circuit. Unfortunately, Colin's sports car breaks down in Cologne and we have to wait for repairs to be effected. There is more water skiing on the Bodensee and we cement our friendships with the Reiner Shads who visit us occasionally thereafter in Swansea.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth has got married whilst in university with an Iraqi refugee from the King Faisel II regime in Iraq. Moazeem, her husband, needs to learn how to drive. So as they are family friends, Perry jumps into his car to teach him driving. Moazeem has a battered, aged, Morris 12 with no brakes. In those pre MOT days the cars were wrecks built before the war. 'Slow down, Moazzem, for Christ's sake' Dad says. Mo swerves the car from side to side to assist with the braking action. 'You need to get these brakes fixed' my Dad implores him. 'Don't worry Perry. It'll be alright' he says with his usual Middle Eastern insouciance and unconcern.

I get to drive Dad's car, too. The Morris Minor traveller with wooden side panels belongs to the care home. So I drive around the private grounds on my own trying to learn how to drive. It is the time of the Suez Emergency. The government in its wisdom decides that

learner drivers from age seventeen can go out alone. Without a qualified accompanying driver. The idea is that, apparently, it would save the nation's fuel when oil supplies had been cut off after the closure of the Suez Canal by President Nasser of Egypt. In 1956 the Egyptian government had nationalised the canal and turned it over to Egyptian national ownership. Israel, Britain and France invaded the country without the political support of the Americans, who, piqued by Britain's attempt to rule the world without them, put a halt to the invasion known as the Tripartite Aggression. Their rightful claim to a canal on their own territory was being suborned. The three attacking countries were forced to pull out and stop their invasion, leading to Britain's subsequent isolation in the world from anything to do with attempts at world hegemony without American consent.

A year later this is me, my Test passed with flying colours, driving the actual taxi that took Mai Zetterling to the Swansea Public Library (it was outside the BBC offices and the museum opposite the library, in the film) to meet the Librarian, Peter Sellers.

My holiday jobs have their moments. Driving backwards up Townhill Road on Christmas morning to reverse the mileage on the milometer is one trick I learn. Other drivers, reputedly, unscrew the speedo cable to the back of the dial on the dashboard. And secure it with a clothes peg, to run around with POB 'passengerson board' to obtain free mileage. And pocket the fare that should go to the company. I'm coming into the real world now!

I inherit an Austin 7 from Uncle Angus. He's getting a new Rover 12 with walnut fascia panel and leather seats. So it's mine for fifteen pounds. I individualise it with a Sparklets Soda Syphon top fixed on a cork inserted into the filler hole of the radiator as a bonnet badge. Swish! It has a starting handle at the front for when you need it to start the engine. 'Whir.Clunk. Whir. Mind your thumb.' It back kicks like the horse that kicked Perry in the goolies at the school field. Similarly to Moazzem's car, the brakes are rubbish. Coming down Glanmor Hill into the Uplands, I open the frontward-facing driver's door. I put out my foot. I brake the jalopy using my shoe leather.

Then later that's me driving it around the Langland Bay golf course car park to impress all my pals. I make a swerving turn downhill. And the front wheel comes off running away into the distance, ending in a round open storm drain. 'Hole in One!' I exclaim, totally betrayed in front of my friends. 'Ok. I'll get another car somehow.'Never mind. Aunty Winnie wants to sells me her Morris 8 for only fifteen quid. I go for it. But the clutch is slipping. 'Can I get to town in it?' I wonder. Probably made it, as I remember.

My next purchase from my National Savings Certificates issued after the war is a 1947 Rover 10. It boasts the new body shape and chassis. Undoubtedly, the best car I have ever owned. It has rod action brakes that can stop on a yard's length. The Rover has a fluid flywheel with syncromesh that allows the driver to select either manual or automatic transmission. You turn a wheel on the fascia panel and then you can change gear without using the clutch. It is only needed to start and stop. Going over Plynlimon Pass in it returning from a trip to Dublin via Holyhead, there is a snow storm. And the roads are treacherous. The car is slipping and sliding. Sinead O'Flaherty is screaming. The baby asleep.Finally, it slips again into the 'off' road side and is saved from a two thousand foot drop by a single strand of barbed wire. My adventures begin…

Chapter 3

Flights and Flight

During one of my holiday jobs, I am driving a newspaper truck at three o'clock in the morning. I pick up the papers from the Paddington train at Port Talbot railway station and deliver them around Ammanford, Pontardulais and Clydach, finishing back at the depot at High Street by noon. 'Do you want some extra money for another delivery run, George?' asks the foreman. 'OK'. Off I go towards Port Talbot again.

In another moment of tiredness and exhaustion, I decide to take a short cut down the Hafod and along the Tawe River into the bottom of Wind Street. This takes us along the Strand, one of the oldest riverside port locations in Britain. You turn left to the North Dock. This dark and weaving road is somehow under the town, below High Street, and travels right along the bank of the River Tawe, where ships have plied their trade in metals such as copper and zinc for centuries. It is where provincial Swansea meets the burgeoning sea world leading out to Australia, Canada, South Africa and the South seas. Along the Strand were warehouses, factories, engineering workshops and slum dwellings. It was the scene of a number of petty crimes, thefts, drunkenness and assaults, some of which resulted in cases before the magistrates Court. But I digress. Forgetting that there is a railway tunnel with a curved arch to pass under en route. I look forward. There is the top of the arch. It seems high enough. 'I'll try and pass under with the truck' I divine. What I don't appreciate is that the curve of the arch has a narrow angle that is much lower than at the top. I strike the corner of the bridge with some force. The impact throws me forward onto the windscreen. No seatbelts in those days.

I stagger in to the local warehouse of Superdrug to get help. Not forgetting to try and sell them some insurance at another time. 'Why, son. Are you alright', asks a nearby warehouseman. 'Yes. I'll be OK.' My shoulder is bruised and battered. But I survive to drive another day. My first entry in the local 'Evening Post' causes some amusement for my friends. And consternation for my family. I should have kept the resulting press photo of the smashed truck for posterity.

Another adventure. I am on a flight back from Jeddah. Suddenly the Tannoy system announces. 'We are diverting to Stansted.' Our arrival airport is slated for Heathrow. 'What's going on?' we ask. There's a suspect package on the flight and a drunk has announced he's going to blow us up and kill himself in the process. There's some panic and distress on board. I'm not wearing shoes. Never keep your shoes on during a long-haul flight. Hold your nose with your fingers and breathe out with your mouth firmly closed. This helps to prevent decompression. And clear your sinuses... Anyway, I digress. George and a couple of guys jump on him, and pin him down until the male steward and a couple of flight attendants can keep him in his seat. In the fracas, George is pushed backward and stumbles. George hits the back of his head on the opposing chair's armrest. At that altitude, I pass out. We are met at Stanstead by the police for him and the paramedics for

me. They board the plane in a remote corner of the airfield. We disembark and make our way to the terminal where, now recovered, we are met by buses for Heathrow.

On the return flight, we land in Jeddah in the middle of the night. I ask the captain after leaving the plane

'Why do we always arrive by night?'

He explains that in the desert the air, or rather thelack of it, during the heat of the day is so thin that the plane would drop like a stone. So they prefer toland at night. Anyway it's much cooler, then, for the passengers.

Talking about decompression, when I'm in Jeddah I take the PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) course. We train in a local swimming pool and learn how to put on the equipment. In those days the air bottle was a separate unit and was strapped on your back. Not in an integrated jacket-like apparatus. I have a goggles and tube for snorkelling when on the surface. We are trained to turn the air bottle on by turning the handle of the tap anti–clockwise and then to give it one half-turn in a clockwise direction. Not for it to stick in the fully open position. We learn buddy breathing, which is offering the tube that you keep in your mouth to your diving partner to breathe in an emergency. All goes well with our practice dives.

We enjoy the multi-coloured coral reefs. There is aquamarine, purple, red, yellow, green, blue, mauve and beige in thousands of hues and tones. All the colours of the rainbow.We see the beauty of the coral formations in their myriads of forms, the fifteen hundred or more varieties of tropical fish –angel fish, butterfly fish, cardinal, down, damsel, gobies, groupers, parrot, you name it. Then of course there are the sharks. What you have to do is 'cut your buddy with a knife, draw blood for the monster and run….' No, I jest, but it may be safer to take off your bottle and defend yourself with it as a weapon, using your knife as well. Fortunately, I never encountered one. I did see two remarkably large giant squid. They were lying there in a crevice under the reef as quiet as mice. If I say they were three metres long, I would not be exaggerating.

We carried on with buddy dives for four or five trips, until it was time to take our first solo dive.I prepare my bottle as instructed, giving it the regulation half-turn back. I descend from the edge of the reef, after wading out in the lagoon. I go down to fifteen metres enjoying the dive. Suddenly I'm out of air. 'What do you do now, George?' I ask myself. My training kicks in. 'Don't panic.' I approach a nearby diver making the slashing hand and arm across throat movement that indicates you are out of air. I'm hoping he will do 'buddy breathing'. No response. He looked pretty panicked behind his goggles. 'Ok.So I'll go back to the surface and climb right up that mountain of water to get air.'

I ascend to ten metres. Training tells me that I have to pause here for a moment. The reason is the condition known as 'the bends' can occur if the diver rushes up to the surface of the water. The bends is caused when air bubbles are contained in the blood, which when reaching the heart can cause the heart to malfunction, where if the bubbles reach it, the right pulmonary ventricle… But I digress; I'm desperate for oxygen, gasping, and still have ten metres to go with another pause at five. I manage another halt at five and swim up with my last final drop of breath.

The reason for the problem is that, on inspection, the valve had been turned completely back clockwise, so that little or no air could get through. Careless me! Anyway, I immediately go back down to avoid the failure complex that happens when you don't succeed at something.

When Perry was swimming in the freezing cold water reservoirs (that he pronounced reservoys) in Tonypandy, Wales, he successfully saves a number of swimmers from drowning. Armed with the Royal Life Saving Society's Bronze medallion, he jumps in to rescue men in trouble in the water. Once reaching them and they put up any sort of struggle, he knocks them out with a short, sharp, boxer's punch to the point of the chin. Thus relaxed, he puts his arm across their chest from behind. His head above water, and employing a circular counter movement of his legs like a scissors, underneath them and on his back, he brings them in to the bank. He performs artificial resuscitation, which in those days involved pressing down firmly on the chest and raising back the arms. But the method of artificial respiration has since been modified by applying direct air from mouth to mouth.

On another flight, to Egypt, I arrive with days to spare to visit Cairo. I visit the tombs of the ancient Egyptians. I marvel at the sarcophaguses on display and the artefacts to be viewed in the Boulak Museum. I see the chambers in the burial tombs of the ancient kings and queens of Egypt and inspect the mummies of the Pharaohs. These dead people are found in the pyramids by Caernarvon. They are taken to the Museum at Cairo where the naked skeletons are mummified. One of the most amazing chambers is inside one of the pyramids. You have to climb up a very narrow sloping inclined passage. I manage to get myself stuck. 'What to do?' I'm trapped in the dark inside a burial chamber. 'Perhaps that's me doomed to expire without air in perpetuity, my body turning to dust over the centuries' I muse. But no. A guide quickly frees me and I'm off again on my travels.

The belly dancers at the Imperial Hotel are most entertaining. They gyrate, whirl and dance with an abandon rarely seen in Europe. Their muscular contortions are like elastic. I listen to Umm Kulthum, the 'Star of the East'. She is in many films up to '76. She is still thought of as the best singer of Arabic music. With a fine, classical voice. They play on the oud, tambour drum and an oriental violin. Some of her vocal items last up to half an hour. I still occasionally listen to the music of Umm Kulthum as a reminder of those halcyon days.

My next port of call is Jeddah. After a pleasant furlough in the Egyptian capital, George turns up at the Cairene airport. 'A flight to Jeddah, please?'

'Sorry, Sir. All the flights are fully booked due to the pilgrimage.'

I wave a packet of two hundred cigarettes (I was a smoker then) in front of the booking clerk.

'Oh yes, Sir. That's right', he says, examining the computer terminal.

'I do have a seat after all. It's next to the window.' The fags duly handed over; I leave Egypt admiring the bustling city, the crazy traffic jams, the pyramids and the Nile below.

One of the adventures that occur when I'm in Jeddah is like this. I'm driving along at sunset in my Chevrolet Caprice with all electric windows, fully air conditioned and cruise control. It is a left hand drive car and I'm driving on the right side of the road. A large car of similar

type pulls up alongside me on my left hand side. A man reaches across from his driver's seat on his left hand side. Through our respective open windows he berates me with a large club – like stick. Fortunately, it does not quite reach me. He is screaming 'Go to Prayers! Go to Prayers!' (Salat! Salat!). He is a mutaween, a member of the religious police who enforce the Shahria law in some Muslim majority countries. I'm also wearing a short sleeved shirt which doesn't help, apparently.

Another time, returning from running with the Brit Hash House Harriers running club,I attempt to get into a lift to go up to our thirteenth floor apartment. I'm standing in my sportswear on the ground floor. Again I'm dressed in shorts and a tee shirt. The lift arrives from the basement car park. Some Bedouin ladies give me an appalled look. And quickly push the door buttons, closing them in my face. They were not willing to let me in to travel in the same elevator. Making eye contact with women in Saudi is not traditional, respectable or advisable.

The Hash House Harriers employ the hares and hounds model for the runs. We drive out to the outskirts of the city into the desert. It's all rocky and creviced. The heat is intense. But diminishing a bit at sunset when we run. Sand dunes stretch away. There, the night before, the hares have marked out a one and a half kilometre track with white flour for the hounds to follow around. There are strict rules for security and personal safety. Moray Souter (Motor Scooter) and Ian Miskelly(Miss Kelly) are the two main runners with over 200 runs achieved. Where are they now? My tally reaches two hundred after my decade in the desert. I have the pewter tankard still on my window ledge as I write.

The run is undertaken largely as a group. There are valleys and cliff faces that rival and surpass Colorado. The hounds set off chasing the hares. But stragglers face the danger of getting lost and dying under the desert sun from dehydration, attacks by wolves, hyenas or worse. On one run I sign out, and chase off into the desert with the hounds. I'm busy chatting up a nurse from the Riyadh hospital in sexy shorts and brief top - her, of course. 'What gorgeous breasts she has', thinks George. 'Where are you from, gorgeous?' 'Lancs, babe', she murmurs. And we lose all track of time.

Suddenly, we're kissing. I get her shorts off. After a quickie, she says

'Give me more of that, George'.

With sweat pouring from us in the heat, I try to emulate Boris Becker's famous under the stairs cupboard bonk in record time.

'Yes, Yes, Yes, Yessss…'

I've heard that before somewhere. It's like an echo from my childhood. She's panting hard. We're up against a rock face, not in a cupboard. She wants more. I'm like a ram. I'm really pounding her.

It's now getting late…'Which way is it back?' we wonder. Following some flour traces in the sand, and keeping to the contours of the valley, we stagger in to be met by the marshals who demand that I be 'gunged' for a late arrival. The gunge is a concoction made up from two lbs. of flour, a dash of coloured food dyes and a litre of water. They didn't use a ball and chain then. They apply a liberal dose of the gooey mixture over my head and 'force' me

to drink a 'yard of ale' that is actually a coloured fruit drink. (please see illustration) That night, after some makeshift ablutions, we both sleep under the stars on the sand, near the cars, in a sleeping bag. Making love Ina sleeping blanket is quite an art when you consider the constricted space. Ask Roger, my mentor! The things I do for love!

Eventually, I'm deported from Saudi as a spy. My Ministry decides that my daily walk along the first floor balcony to get some well-deserved fresh air is illegal. It is misinterpreted as spying on a sensitive Ministry. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh is under the impression that the Brits are spying on them to get information about sensitive oil contracts and military hardware. As if the British Foreign Office would employ a Yawoo Welshman as an English spy! I'm put under house arrest and remain at home for seven weeks before receiving my deportation papers. The reality was that they were discombobulated with my part time job as a television presenter and cultural programmes director for Channel II Saudi TV. I'd spent nine years in the role, and they were calculating that the ten year bonus upcoming would be too much for them. Money talks!

The embassies and consulates move from Jeddah to Riyadh in order to centralise the diplomacy of the country. The official opening of the Brit embassy in Riyadh is performed by Prince Charles and Diana.The ceremony over, Charles and Diana work the crowd. Luckily, one of my students dressed in a western suit is policing the spectators. He beckons me to the front. 'Mr George, stand here', he kindly allows. Charles is on the other side of the path and Diana on this side. She comes along, and noticing my blue spotted silk tie exclaims

'Oh. I do like your tie.'

'Yes, Ma'am. I wore it specially for you' I smoothly retort.

I had heard that Diana likes spots. She smiles so graciously and warmly with those big blue eyes and perfect English Rose skin. I am smitten for life.

An amusing scene then takes place. Charles gets in to the official embassy Rolls on his side of the car. Diana enters from our side. They do not look at or acknowledge each other. The body language is frozen and disconnected. The tension between them is apparent. The Embassy Rolls refuses to start. The chauffeur gets out and starts to push the vehicle with the help of a few Saudi officials in long thobes and turbans. Befitting the role of a prince, Charles does not get out to push. They eventually manage a kick start and off they go to the great amusement of the assembled crowd.

The day they deport me, the Saudi officials come to the flat. They admire my kitchen china, which I give them as a gift. It wasn't their fault, after all. We all spend time on the journey out to the airport outside Riyadh buying roadside apricots. Of course, they have to be tasted and enjoyed in the relaxed Saudi way.

Whilst leaving, I sum up my years in the desert. Not all bad. Not all good. There were good Saudis and bad ones. After all, one of my students, Abdullah, loaned me the money to buy my first car there. And did not insist on prompt repayment.A few contretemps with hot-headed Saudi motorists adds to the roll call. Then there was the boss at Saudi TV who made me redo a whole programme I recorded on Bertolt Brecht. Because I had pronounced his name sounding like 'Brescht' rather than the Germanic 'Brecht'. I recorded a hundred radio programmes entitled orally 'Schoools of Litrechuchure' in my inimical Welsh way. I used to

record the introductory music from vinyl records at home during the vacations. I made cultural, sports and religious shows for the expatriate community in the English language on Saudi TV II. They pay for my programmes and never default.

My highlight was my interview with the very tall Jackie Charlton, whose Geordie accent was a bit difficult for me. Jackie was graceful and accommodating as an interviewee.Saudi football is played very much on the carpet with little heading. And I mean carpet literally because they are synthetic pitches, not grass. Now, I'mcovering the horse racing stadium at the Riyadh races, where Brit horse owners and trainer of King Khaled's Frankel, the erstwhile Henry Cecil, take part. Anyway, after the show one of the princes' assistants says 'Come on everyone. We're going back to the palace for refreshments'. We all pile into the cars and drive to the palace. Behind a very long louver screen they pull back there's a bar and it has every drink you can imagine. Whisky. Vodka. Gin. Rum. Campari and Soda.

'Would you like a drink? the Saudi asks me'.

It's a dry country, right? I wriggle nervously.

'Sorry I don't drink. I'll take afruit juice'.

The Saudis are all getting sloshed and me, the Brit, sipping a soda… Strange World!

Returning to my deportation. We finish up tasting and buying the apricots. Running so late, they end up putting me and Zeena into a car out to the plane with our entire luggage from ten years, my AT / XT IBM computer and monitor, souvenirs, a hand-carved coffee table and a Bedouin incense burner, an onyx ornament, a pair of Wellingtons (purchased tax free) and a prayer mat, not forgetting Zeena's luggage. We are almost late for the flight. But the captain has not ordered the doors closed. And we scramble aboard the BA flight to Heathrow.

Arriving home, it is sad to hear of Elizabeth's sudden tragic early death from a brain haemorrhage. May and John are distraught and Moazeem gutted. He loves her so much. Rob in Canada cannot get over for his sister's funeral. Moazeem subsequently remarries and stays close to May. Even introducing his new wife to her. May is so graciousand kind,she takes to her and they remain friends. Life has to go on, doesn't it?

So I carry on. From one extreme of heat to another. I take a flight to Chicago. I arrive at the Greyhound bus station in the late afternoon. The journey up North in Wisconsin is long yet absorbing. I'm heading for Milwaukie looking for work. It's now about two in the morning and the bus piles us out at our destination. I take a taxi and say to the driver.

'Please find me a cheap motel for the night'.

We drive out of the city. It is now snowing hard and freezing. He drops me at the hotel and I wave him a cheery farewell, thinking that I wouldn't be needing him.

Behind a thick plate glass panel, the motel clerk says very gruffly.

'I need photo ID'.

I offer him my Brit driving licence, which in those days did not contain a picture of the driver.

'That's no good. I can't give you a room without ID.'

I protest. It's two in the morning after all. That's me. Kicked out of the hotel in the middle of night. I'm trudging along the main highway in deep snow up to my knees, with a heavy suitcase and feeling pretty low. Along comes another car. I hail it. The driver is a friendly Muslim guy named Abdul. He takes me out to another motel. They check me in without question. Horses for courses, I suppose.

The next morning, it's ten below zero. I have no hat. I need to get to town to buy warm protection. I've never known such a cold place. Blood must be thin after Saudi, probably. I queue waiting for the Milwaukie bus system. A driver comes along. I board.

'Where's your token?' he asks.

It's freezing. I want to get in the warm. I only have notes of ten dollars.

'Get it changed!' he barks.

And again I'm kicked out in the snow. Getting to think this place is not for me. I eventually sort out some change and ride into town. The wind is blowing in from the lake. Cold? It would freeze the icicles on your nose. In town, I find a military hardware shop – guns, rifles, hunting knives, that sort of thing. I buy a balaclava helmet and stride back on my way.

I decide to fly back to Chicago, Illinois and over the Great Lake. At the airport, the aircraft awaiting us is a propeller job. We board, taking care to avoid the propeller area in case of danger. Inside the fuselage, it's small and cramped. I wonder if the flight will be safe in such a crate. This is the U S of A after all, so it must be alright. The pilot overhears my negative chatter and tells me to 'shut the fuck up'. We taxi out to the runway. A massive convoy of trucks surrounds us. The blizzard is blowing snow like mad. We are in white out conditions. The propellers scream in the icy wind. They de-ice the wings of the de Havilland with chemicals and we get out to the runway. It's all been cleared by snow ploughs and we make our way. We take off somehow and after a twenty – five minute flight over the lake, we arrive at General O'Hara airport, Chicago.

Another time I'm in France. I run a red light on the Cote d'Azur in Monaco in a Simca with gear change in the dash. The traffic lights don't have the amber warning phase that we have. They change immediately from green to red. The cops chase me and I foolishly make a run for it. I get out of the car and tearing off my clothes, swim out to one of those pontoons where you can sunbathe and dive. I take a quick sunbathe.

I'm ''suntanned, wind blown. Honeymooners at last alone.''

I'm dreaming about the film 'Pal Joey' with Grace Kelly, Louis Armstrong and Frank Sinatra.

'While I give to you and you give to me
True love, true love
So on and on it will always be
True love, true love

For you and I have a guardian angel
On high, with nothing to do
But to give to you and to give to me
Love forever, true'

Poor, beautiful, Grace Kelly, after her marriage to Prince Rainier, is killed on the same cliff road that I'm speeding on. But I digress… I finish my sybaritic spot of sunbathing. I dive back in and strike out for the shore. The gendarmerie is waiting for me on the beach. At the police station, I try out my rudimentary French. 'Suis Brittanique. Je ne savais pas que les feux de signialisation ont changes. Ils sont differentes que dans l'Anglettere'. ('I'm Brittanic. I do not know that the lights have signialisation exchange. They are different than in the Anglettere') I spend the night in the cooler and the next morning they let me off.

That reminds me of an earlier adventure in France, as a youth on a hitch hiking holiday in 1959. General Charles de Gaulle had suddenly reversed his policy on the decolonisation of Algeria and the country was tense. That August, they were looking for any suspicious Algerian travellers. As a swarthy, olive skinned Welshman, I am a good target. I'm in the back of a Citroen 2CV travelling with another Brit and a kind French farmer who had offered us the lift. We are motoring between Lille and Paris. There's a road block ahead. We are ordered out of the car. A massive burly French cop comes up to us. He takes out his revolver from the leather holster and points it in my chest. It's a bit disturbing. I had noted in my geography lessons that Lille is a large industrial town near Belgium, with a population of 1.885 million people, mostly engaged in heavy industry with a prominent statue of President Charles de … but I digress. He demands my passport. The other Brit has been sent packing. The gendarme examines my passport for some ten minutes and then with a wave of his gun orders me off. I go my way again striding off as fast as my legs will carry me.

So off I hitch hike to Spain. I'm travelling on twenty pounds – about a week's salary in those days. Reaching Lille, I head South and get lifts via Paris, ClemontFerrond and Lyon. Lyon is such a big city I have to take a bus to get across it. I found that it's best to be on the outskirts of cities to pick up a lift. So I get a lift from a commercial traveller travelling South in his Peugeot. It's a comfortable car. But suddenly he has his hand on my knee and it's moving up my thigh.It reminds me of the joke Bri' always used to tell.

'Take your hand off my knee.'

'That's not my hand', the boy says.

'That's not my knee.' the girl replies'.

But I joke… I grab the ignition keys. I throw them out of the window. The car grinds to a stop. I run off down the road escaping from another tight spot.

The Costa Brava is magnificent. I follow the railway line and jump trains all the way in to Barcelona. The bull fight is a worryingly barbaric form of entertainment. I am able only to afford a ticket for 'sol' (sun) and not 'sombra' (shade), the more expensive side. It is terrifically hot. Riders on horseback lance the bull. Horses are getting gored. The matadors sway their marvellous red capes and trip in their tasselled, patent leather shoes. Their sleek black hair is tied back in a feminine bow. The bull paws the ground angrily. He dashes at

the bullfighter. He makes a passing sweep with the cape and in a balletic movement avoids the rushing bull. The bull attacks again. But the man slips into one of the barriers and hides himself from the furious animal. Standing there.Intimidating the exhausted and terrified bull. He arrogantly paces forward like a toreador. He plunges his sword deep into the bull's neck. The sword is decorated with coloured ribbons. Blood pours from the wounded animal. He has conquered. The crowd is ecstatic. 'Ole!. Ole!' I am violently sick.

Whilst in Barcelona, I am supping at a bar near the statue of Christopher Columbus. He hailed from Barca. I'm enjoying the Spanish el vino. Suddenly, from behind, an ugly, wizened, old prostitute reaches between my trousered legs and grabs my manhood. I rush off. Why am I always escaping from the sexual advances of women? I ask myself.

On the return journey, I decide to return by the scenic route via the Pyrenees mountains. Remember that I am on twenty quid. I survive on freshly baked loaves of Spanish bread and grapes stolen from roadside vineyards. I only sleep one night in a hedge. The nights are warm and balmy.

Staying at a Youth Hostel Association stopover in Paris.It is unaccountably built in the middle of a street with traffic on both sides. Bedding down for the night. I leave my trousers on the bed with my wallet in the pocket. At four in the morning, I hear some sort of commotion at the foot of my paillasse. I'm too tired to awaken. In the morning, I examine my wallet. My last few francs are gone. There's another Brit staying at the youth hostel. He lends me ten francs new money to get on the ferry home. The French had revalued the currency by crossing off two noughts at the end of the figure. Thus, a thousand francs became ten francs. I give him a cheque in exchange.

I get a lift in a 'deux chevaux' (2cv) on my way back home. The driver explains that he only wants me to make a heavy weight in the middle of the back seat to stabilise the air suspension system of the Citroen. He motors at top speed something like a hundred and twenty kilometres an hour. We get on the ferry together. I reach Blighty. Never been so glad to see the white cliffs of Dover. At home, I send a letter of thanks to my British benefactor. And make sure I do work as a labourer on a building site. To cover the cheque I have given him.

Another time in France, I'm asked to train some private chateau school boys in horse riding. I'd learned to ride a bit at Sinead's family home in Ireland. They had a stable of hunters. One particular nasty character was Harry. Out riding him - he was thirteen hands tall – he tries to unseat me during a gallop through the woods. He gallops towards a clump of trees. Choosing one with a low branch, he races under the lowest branch, deliberately. Despite me shouting and pulling at him to turn. I just manage to dip down at the side of the saddle, my head low, releasing my foot from the stirrup and pass under the branch. The beast!

Anyway, I turn up at the chateau on my moped, newspapers inside the front of my coat to protect from the wind. To give my first riding lesson to the pupils. The director of the institute shows me to the stables where there are a dozen horses. We saddle up the horses and I chat to the students about how I know how to ride. And my extensive knowledge of horses. I tell them all about Harry. I lead the boys out in to the yard where we mount up into the saddle. We trot the horses up the lane in a column and reach a five bar gate at the end. Whereupon, all the horses turn round and gallop back to the stables. I don't think I

was in charge of that situation. So I say 'Ok Boys. Now that's how not to do it. Let me show you how…'

I decide to take further lessons myself at a *manege* to prepare better for the next week's lesson. At the *manege* we trot around gracefully with the ring master,armed with a long whip, calling out instructions. We learn trotting, cantering and how to stand up in the stirrups. Later, I go out hunting with the French in the Forest of Blois. Their hunting horns are far more melodious and tuneful than the English ones. The tone quality is primitive and raw, and a delight to listen to. I had rather hoped to play rugby as a wing three quarter for Toulouse. But family commitments and all that prevented me.

Wine is plentiful and cheap. I go up to the vineyard in the Rover, which I now run on 'mazout' the cheaper domestic heating fuel. The smoke belches out. The valves are burning out. It has a 'Cymru' sign to distinguish me as a Celt. With one of those huge bottles covered in straw. I think they're called carboys. They fill it up for only four francs, old money. Before I know it, I'm on two bottles of wine a day!

Chapter 4

Revolutions and Reversals

'Firooze, a two word verb is called a phrasal verb. It can have a number of words in a phrase like 'turn on, turn off, go through, get on, get off, take care, get along' and so on'. I explain carefully.

'Mr George. What do you know about Dickens' 'Great Expectations', it's in the exam', she pleads.

'It is a story about an orphaned boy' I reply, 'who is convinced that he is from a very good family and will one day succeed in finding them. And become wealthy, rich and famous. The frightening convict, Magwitch who Pip, the boy, feeds in the cemetery turns out to be his benefactor. He gives him all of his fortune and turns him into a 'gentleman'. Pip's friend, Miss Haversham's ward, Estella, turns out to be the blood daughter of the convict. It suggests that some rich families had acquired their wealth from dubious sources. The story fits a trend in popular nineteenth-century fiction, the *bildungsroman* that depicts personal growth and development, usually from infancy to manhood.'

I'm teaching English as a Foreign Language at the British Council, Tabriz, Iran. Suddenly a brick comes crashing through a high window in the library where I am working. There had been rumblings and rumours about the rule of the grandly titled Aryamehr Shahanshah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran who had inherited the 'one thousand year kingdom' from his father, Reza Pahlavi. In actual fact his fatherhad overthrown the previous Qarghar regime of Amad Shah in 1921 and, with the help of the British, had established the new monarchy in Tehran in 1925. Pahlavi's secret police, the Savak, were the oppressive, cruel and hated spy organisation terrorising every Iranian family. But I digress. 'Don't panic', I call out and carry on with the lesson.

Firooze is dresssed in a Chanel suit with expensive jewellery and uncovered hair, whilst in the Council buildings. Once outside, she dons the black veil known as a 'chador' covering all of her body and her face, except for one eye. I had been noticing in the streets that there were corner kiosks and shops selling radical C60 tapes of fundamentalist mullahs preaching a new, rabid Islam through the medium of magnetic tape. Favourites were the teachings of Abd A'la Maududi, the founder of the Jamaat al Islami, a Salafi organisation. These rantings were being blasted out from nearly every street corner. Oddly enough, the songs of Cat Stevens, who becomes Yusuf Islam, are very popular due, I suppose, to his conversion to Islam. He too preaches a message of conversion, hope and redemption through personal discovery. It is a period of directionlessness and uncertainty in a Britain, reduced now to a 'Winter of Discontent' and a 'Three Day Week'.

‘I’m on the Road to Find Out’, he sings:

‘So on and on you go, the seconds tick the time out. There’s so much left to know, and I’m on the road to find out, ooh.

Then I found my head one day when I wasn’t even trying, and here I have to say, ‘cos there’s no use in lying, lying.

Yes, the answer lies within, so why not take a look now, kick out the devil sin, and pick up, pick up a good book now, ooh.’

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No doubt the book he had in mind was the Holy Quran.

To continue about the Savak. They are the Shah’s secret police and a very nasty crowd they are, too. People are ‘disappeared’ and many tortured for the slightest dissenting voices. We are socialising at SnamProjeti, the Italian construction company swimming pool. We are sitting around the pool soaking up the sun. My flatmate, Maurice Trainer says to me

‘See that guy over there.’

‘Yeah’ I go.

‘He’s everywhere we are. Haven’t you noticed?’

‘Can’t say I had’, me being the trusting type.

‘You wait.’

And sure enough, he’s at the Iran – America Friendship Society do. At the embassy party for the Fourth of July and at the Council fundraiser.We’re obviously being watched. Firooze tells me later that she has been called in and asked to account for her association with us at the Iran – America Friendship club. She explains that she’s just jumped out of her Mercedes sports to see a friend and happens to see her teacher and talks to him. Nothing more.Nothing less. She gets off with a warning not to associate with foreigners.

The anti Pahlavi movement is gaining ground rapidly. People are mobilising. There are gunmen on the streets. I’m returning from a visit to Zeena’s family, behind their high brick walled Persian mansion. Her brother, Dawood is with us. I’m driving their green, Iranian built Paykan with a British manufactured (Rootes) engine block. I’m not accustomed to the headlights and I’m approaching my apartment in Baroon Avak Street. There’s a road block. I’m on high beam.

‘Eaaasstt!!’ (Stop) they scream. I can’t find the dip switch. Machine guns are pointed at the car. Men are shouting. Flash lights pointed. I had noticed that the militant groups were bearded, very Islamic-looking types with old ragged fatigues and out of date Soviet era weapons. They chant Koranic slogans. Allahu Akbar! Tagbir! BisMillah! They promote a Sharia law agenda for Iran and revere the Ayatollah Khomeini currently in seclusion in Paris, who is directing the Islamic resurgence... But I digress, I quickly pull up at the frontier post. Men rush forward. Dawood leans out of the window and explains, in perfectly cool terms,

that we are supporters of Ayatollah ShariatMadari, the Azerbayjan area cleric who is leading local resistance. And we pass by with a wave. I manage to dip the lights.

Later the fighting intensifies in BaroonAvak Street. Both sides are machine gunning outside the apartment. Zeena and I retire to a back room. The dumdum bullets can pass through a wall and slay you. We are uncomfortable and concerned. There's a knock on the door.

'Can you supply sheets and pillow cases to stem the blood of the wounded?'

We rip up a few sheets and pass them out.

In the morning, we attempt to go out to get meat. The butcher's is at the town end of the street. Approaching the town, we are tear-gassed by the Shah's riot police from the top of the town square. The kindly butcher says:

'Come into the shop.'

He lifts the shutters. Eyes streaming, coughing and spluttering, we gladly accept his offer.

'Smell this vinegar in a saucer and imbibe the fumes.'

It helps. And we hurry back home thankfully, shopping done.

The Council offices are attacked with heavy machine guns by the insurgents. The Director has been advised by the Foreign Office to leave. And I am the only Brit left in the place. It falls to me to inspect the damage to the Director's bedroom at the top of the building. They have climbed on to adjacent roofs and machine gunned the bedroom from two sides. What would have happened to Nick, if he and his wife had stayed in that room for a few more days, is mind boggling. The place is torn to shreds.

It is now down to me to sell off all the furniture and equipment belonging to the British. I hold an auction sale at the offices…in Turkish! I'd always wanted to be an auctioneer, ever since that time in Neath when I'd heard those magic words…'Going, going, gone!' Office chairs –bidding prices in Azari are Atmeshtooman,Yetmesh, Hashtad. A picture – small items at low prices - On Beertooman, On Ichee, On Ouuch, On Dirt, On Besh, On Alti, On Yeti, On Sachees, On Dockoos…Satelurp!(Sold!) I shout. Mr Harcopian, the office manager, banks the money in the Council account.

A few days later, I take Zeena'sHilman to go to the Ministry of Higher Education to try to collect my monthly salary. The office is probably closed due to the revolutionary activity, but I'm going to try. I'm driving towards the bazaar area of the city. Suddenly, as I round a street corner, there's hundreds of people surging forward towards the car like a football match crowd. They are all panicky and rushing away from the Pahlavi regime soldiers who are firing at them point blank. Hundreds are killed. The bodies are piled up in a mound in the square. That's me with a huge crowd of people surrounding the car, reversing back away from the firing.

I'm trying to remember my fork-lift truck driving days when I had to steer using the rear wheels. I'm looking in the mirror and trying to see my way clear. That's no good. I stare back out of the rear window and try to see what is behind me. It's hopeless. I remember my visits to the bazaar with affection. A collection of all the spices, materials, carpets, birds,

fish, and fowl is on display in its historic domed roof corridors and passage ways. We buy tamarind, sumac and coriander, as well as silk carpets for what is to be our future home. But I digress… eventually I find a way through and escape from the scene and drive back to the flat.

We now have to leave. There is no other alternative. The Council decides to transfer all the remaining valuable Persian carpets that were not put up for auction and take them by road to Tehran – a journey of a thousand miles. I accompany the driver in the Mercedes truck with some of my furniture and belongings. It's a fourteen hour journey in excessive heat, dust and on badly made roads. Eventually we arrive in the capital to join the British Embassy staff. I'm allocated by the Embassy to a very grand apartment in Shirazi Street near 'pompe e' benzin' - the petrol station.The lounge room is as long as a cricket pitch and it has four bedrooms and a grand piano.

My whole library is shipped over by sea from the UK in a container. There's a swimming pool in the grounds. There are servants providing tea in the traditional Persian cups at every turn. Mr Rehani, the caretaker, is helpful and indulgent of our every need. Water melons for afternoon thirst quenching and luxury mutton kebabs for dinner. It was all heat. Long siestas in the afternoons, a bit of skiing in the winter – yes, Mount Damavand has a ski centre! My skis and boots are shipped from the UK. Shopping in the well-stocked malls is a treat.

Some weeks later it was amusing to see my wooden crate from the library shipment clearly marked 'BFCO Teheran via Dubai' being used as a habitation (yes, a shelter) by the local Iranians. I buy a Ford Sierra from the embassy staff who are leaving. It is bright yellow. I'm running around Tehran in the middle of a revolution in the most obviously Brit vehicle imaginable. At a crucial point in the revolution, I drive up Mount Damavand to make my eternal search for fresh air. I'm parked up looking at the great view over Tehran. A cop car comes up the mountain road. He pulls up alongside me.

'What are you doing here?' he demands.

'Are you sending radio signals to the Eengleesh?'

'No.' I reply. 'I'm just enjoying the view.'

Get down from this mountain and don't let me see you up here, again', he demands.

'Yes, Officer', I reply politely.

Why does everyone seem to think I'm a spy? As if the British Foreign Office would employ a locally recruited employee as a spy. Well I tell a lie actually. Because, come the final days of the Shah and the establishment of an interim government under Bani Sadr, I'm asked, as the last Brit in Tehran, to report by phone to the Resident now hiding in Bahrein about daily events in the country. No doubt the phone is tapped, but I send my innocuous coded messages to my superiors. 'The chicken has left the coop.' 'The bearded one is in Mehrebad.' 'B S has got on an aeroplane dressed as a woman.'

The Council had a cultural centre in central Tehran at Ferdowsi Street, near the statue of the poet. It was a bit cockroach infested, but not bad. The classes were running smoothly. The

Committay of the Iranian revolution enters the Council Centre with machine guns and demands that it close its offices. English language is no longer wanted. The Director of Studies, John Warrington, decides to relocate to a quieter northern suburb of the city out at Afrika Boulevard.

We recruit, test, and receive fees from hundreds of prospective students. They are desperate to learn English to escape from the revolution in their country. But over the same weekend the Council is forcibly closed. And thousands of pounds of British money has to be repaid to the unfortunate students who have registered for classes. I try to teach English privately to earn some cash at the Residency, but I'm soon visited by a member of the Revolutionary Committay who says

'You can't continue with English here. We don't want to see streams of people visiting a foreign compound. And we only require Farsi language now.'

'OK' I reply, acutely embarrassed about my open shelves of alcohol – whisky, gin, rum, vodka, Campari – we'd run out of soda. Either he didn't notice them. Or he was not concerned as a member of a fundamentalist group of hard line Muslims taking over the country. Anyway, he departs with a smile and wishes me all the best in the future.

Driving into Pahlavi Street (now Vali Asr) in the city centre leading to Ferdowsi Street under the flyover. A traffic officer steps out into the traffic and beckons me to stop. He's joined by a dozen other armed uniformed men. The car is carrying foreign plates and, as I said, is bright yellow. They want to know the owner of the car. I show my papers.

'Why are you still in the country'? 'Leave this country tomorrow!'

The following night Saddam Hussein's F16s bomb the airport. They streak over the city at lightning speed. It is pretty worrying. We spend the night in the mountains away from the bombing. The city is in complete blackout. I try to remember all the good times – the tennis, trips to picnic out in the verdant valleys in Damavand. The long cool nights when the cicadas chirp and crickets sing, the locusts swarm and the bees hum, the ants follow their social systems. But I digress…

We have to leave, once again. I organise an overland return to Wales in the car. The only problem is that petrol supplies in Eastern Turkey are very sparse. I buy some used Feta cheese tins measuring ten litres to store petrol. They go in the boot with our luggage. I can still smell the petrol spilled over on our clothes. That night the car is impounded by the caretaker.

I have all our dining tablecloths, embroidered linen and expensive silver in the luggage. Pity we had to leave behind the crystal chandeliers and the winter sports gear we had bought. Never mind the grand piano. It's probably still there along with the Peacock Throne. The handmade silk carpets go back to Zeena's. The rest are sold. We manage to get the Ford out, despite the caretaker. My son, Seanie O'Flaherty, over from Britain, jumps in. And we head back to Tabriz for home.

An uneventful journey back to Tabriz.Seanie is taken sick and is looked after by Zeena's sister. We take our last look at the palatial Persian house with its balconies, gardens and grand pillars. The oaken doors and windows are pre Pahlavi and solid in their structure.

Brass fittings and massive arches enhance the effect. The garden has a pool with goldfish swimming freely. There are pomegranate trees, hazelnut trees and pistachios. The vines provide a luscious crop of white and red grapes. Doves come to visit in the evening coolness. It is the last remnant of a more splendid era of Iran. If only we'd seen the slendours of Shiraz, the Mosque at Isfahan or the rain soaked hills, lakes and marshes of the Caspian region.

We wave farewell to Azerbaygan and carry on into Turkey. At Dogabayuzit we enter another world. Its coal fired houses belch out acrid smoke. Horse drawn carts made from the back axles of cars plough through the town. It seems like a century from the past. Its ancient fortifications and ramshackle houses form a dusty backdrop. Petrol supplies in the East of the country are plentiful after all. I pour my cheese cans of petrol into the tank at a petrol station. I just remember the Boy Scouts motto: Be Prepared!

With Zeena and Seanie driving alternate shifts, we cross the endless plains of Eastern Turkey. We drive down the middle of the empty roads at high speed. In Istanbul we pick up transit visas for Bulgaria. The grand mosque is a magnificent site and the Bospherous calm and inviting. Sadly, we have no time to swim or visit the attractions. Half way through the journey we decide, on the spur, to take a detour for a short holiday in Yugoslavia, as it then was.

We spend the nighten route at a 'Bed and Breakfast' establishment. Sean stays the night in his own room. There is no lock on the door. On checking to see if he is safe and well, he takes me for a burglar and jumps on me in the dark. In the morning, we laugh outrageously at a notice behind his door which states 'Bad Breakfast 50 million Turkish Liras.' Perhaps it was a misprint for Bed and Breakfast. However, it was a bad breakfast consisting of two dried up black olives, some cold coffee without milk, and pieces of stale unleavened bread.

In Yugoslavia we see Split and Dubrovnik. We drive to Split via a twisting, winding, coast road cut into steep mountain slopes. It gives us a succession of dramatic mountain, Adriatic and inland lake views. The busy port of Split was home to the palace of Diocletian. That evening Seanie goes out on the town and we stay at the local taverna supping the ouzo and cherry brandy. Sean returns and, over tiny cups of dark coffee, recounts his evening programme. He'd been talking to a local doctor – one medic to another - who says that he's a Croat and those men are Serbs and those people are Bosnians. Sean concludes that there's an agenda there. And that something dark and racially mysterious is fomenting. Sure enough, a few years later, the Serbs open up a corridor to Banja Luka and the Bosnians are killed, imprisoned and tortured in their thousands. Not another revolution!

Arriving home safely only to hear that Elizabeth and Moazzim's children, Alan and Cedric – Alan is a software engineer and Cedric into childcare - are planning to emigrate to Australia. And we are not sure if we shall ever see them again.

Chapter 5

Theatres and Thespians

At the Cottage Homes there is a large dining hall built by the Americans to aid the war effort. Dot says:

'No pocket money unless you take part in the Homes' musical presentation.'

So I agree to take part and sing and act. I have to be the evil, cruel Professor. A part George has played very well since.

Glyn Hughes, the school musician, Trevor Lewis, the sign writer, and Bernard Goss, the Maths tutor all help on a voluntary basis. Glyn tinkles all the keys and makes lovely music, Trevor paints up the scenery in bright coloured hues and Bernard helps with the drama presentation. Perry looks after everything at the home.

I strut and do my stuff. I have a black, frock coat with tails, a shiny top hat and a huge beard. My solo goes down well. And I find myself enjoying my first theatrical experience. We do three nights and a matinee and George is hooked on acting.

At university, I join the DramSoc and am recruited for the forthcoming production of 'The Taming of the Shrew'. This is a sequence that I've envied to play ever since. Without success. I'm selected by Mr Jarrett for the part of Tranio. In the meantime, I'm dating Sinead O'Flaherty. And we make a fine couple as Tranio and Bianca in our Elizabethan costumes - starched tunic and stockings, broad sleeved shirts with ruffs for George, and tight bodices, full length skirts, ruffs, wigs and pearls for her. I learn the lines quickly, whilst attempting to pursue my studies of English, History and Economics. I look in the mirror and repeat the lines to myself over and over in my student digs. We walk along the seafront to our rehearsals and we 'kick bar', an old tradition now lost since the reconstruction of the Esplanade at Aberystwyth.

TRANIO
'And I am one that love Bianca more
Than words can witness, or your thoughts can guess.'

These lines are expressed on stage with more conviction than is required. I look out for talent scouts from the BBC in the audience and hope that Hugh Weldon, one of our visitors, will engage me soon as a TV personality.

We take the play on tour to St David's College, Lampeter. Dot and Perry come up in the Morris Minor. Perry says:

‘You’re too much yourself in it. You’re not acting, George. It’s too matter of fact’ (like this book, according to Jane Marie.) Little did he know...

My next production is John Arden’s Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance. I only have one line this time, played in a heavy northern accent:

‘And there’s more un us an' all…’

And it’s offstage!

During the threatened coal strike, Serjeant Musgrave and his four soldiers attempt to quell the strike that is on the point of descending into violence. And the sergeant promises the town officials that by addressing the miners who are on strike and starting a recruitment campaign, he will remove the troublemakers. By pointing a machine gun at the crowd, threatening to kill the dignitaries and by showing them the corpse of their former mate hanging from the Market Cross, he means to bring home to them the frightful meaning of insurrection. And what can happen to the perpetrators.

Tim Caldecott directs and with help from his girlfriend, Margaret, he makes a good fist at a student production.

Our next presentation is Bertolt Brecht’s ‘The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui’ (‘Der Aufhaltsame Aufsteigdes Arturo Ui‘) which chronicles the rise of Hitler. It is in mock-heroic blank verse. It takes the form of a parody of a Chicago gangster. The characterisation of the tyrannical hero is based on that of Richard III. The murder of Roehm shadows the plight of Buckingham. The Hitler character sleeps with the widow of his victim. In a very long play with seventeen interminable short scenes, Tim begs us not to act in the classical theatrical way with projection of voice and character. But to be just there as normal human beingscaught in their moment. And to portray the characters as we are ourselves existentially, not as an actor’s representation.

‘There is no need to ‘act’’ he says.

I find this very difficult after some years of showing off on stage. I am preoccupied with my honours degree exams and cannot concentrate on the lines. Tim relegates me to some minor scenes in which I basically just stand there doing very little.

We put on the play in the Town Hall with its larger stage and huge auditorium. ‘Arturo Ui’ tries to transfer the biography of Hitler from his early days to the occupation of Austria, into the milieu of gangsterdom in Chicago. It is not a very successful play, with its obvious derivation in Richard III. The parallels between Hitler’s manipulations of German industrialists and moneymen and Chicago businessmen do not work. The connections between the Chicago capitalists (vegetable sellers) and gangsters are unsuccessful. The original characters are too different from the gangsters he mirrors them with.

Back in the UK after my year in France, I join a local dramatics troupe in Gravesend, Kent. They are putting on ’The Sound of Murder’ by William Fairchild, a murder mystery in three Acts. I audition for the role of the handsome hero, but am allocated to the part of the police Inspector Davidson. ‘The Kent Messenger’ reports that George was ‘wooden’ in his representation of the detective. But I had thought that to play a policeman you needed to

be uninteresting, bland and unimaginative. I played him as a downtrodden, unhappy and untidy fellow rather in the style taken up later by Peter Falk the American TV actor who portrayed the scruffy detective Sgt Columbo.

'When the curtain rises Davidson is alone in the room, speaking on the telephone. The body and the gun have been removed. The window curtains up L. are open.'

DAVIDSON. Into the telephone. 'Yes. Yes. Now listen. I want the report on the fingerprints as soon as possible… Yes. They're on their way now. And phone me here as soon as you get that other information – it's very important…Right.'

I act as deadpan as I can.

A brief synopsis of the play is that Charles, a writer of children's stories is popular in his field, but not at home. He is a calculating sadist at home. Anne, his wife takes up with another man for affection. And eventually the two of them make a fool-proof plan to eliminate the husband. Unfortunately, however, the writer's frustrated secretary learns of it by listening to a Dictaphone tape he has made. She uses her information to trap the other man into marriage, after he has killed the husband. They go away together and Davidson is led to believe that the husband drowned chasing a prowler.

But some weeks later there is a surprise in store when the husband turns up as sound as a bell – having been warned in time by his secretary. True to form, he takes a cruel delight in tormenting his wife, and later goes upstairs for a bath. Meanwhile, the secretary could not go through with the wedding, and the lover returns. The husband is still in the way. Or is he? According to the law he had died three weeks before.The play is 'intriguing, diverting and rewarding', according to 'The Sunday Times'.

However, I'm too busy dating Halinka in South Kensington to spend too much time on the development of the character of the intrepid inspector. I prefer the train journey on the North Kent line to Charing Cross. The walk down Villiers Street to the Embankment.And the District to South Ken, on the other evenings when I'm not a thespian. At Halinka's boss Karl Mayer of the 'Washington Post''s soirees I talk to Amis Pere about Swansea pubs and our shared girlfriend, Margaret Vakeal. She is a few years older than me. At the Rock and Fountain, Newton, Mumbles over a few drinks, after 'last orders!' she invites me to sleep with her. George turns down the invitation.

'I have to get back home. Mum and Dad are expecting me' I excuse myself.

Why am I always escaping from the sexual advances of women? I ask myself. Is it because I'm afraid of them? My son, Theo Pusczkarczyck, is reputed also to have declined an invitation from an Argentinian general's wife in South America, claiming pressing business, despite her continued attempts the following morning to bed him.(see Harry Thompson: 'Penguins Stopped Play') What is it about women who make the running? Does it offend our sense of chivalry? Or is it a challenge to our defences that we put up and do not like to have removed? Basically, I think I am in awe of women. And my fear of them has fuelled this life long campaign to defeat them in battle.

Talking about battles, at the Raytheon compound in Riyadh we put on 'Oh!What aLovely War'. My first reaction was of horror and disgust that a so desperately murderous,

pointless, generationally genocidal and vainglorious campaign should become the subject of theatre comedy. But by making the subject of the play WWI in a comic way, the take on war becomes applicable to any war in any generation. Then, like the Brechtian play, in this case it too is anti-war.

My character of the Master of Ceremonies is very prominent at the beginning and in certain scenes. Things like the Plant Pot could have been taken by the M.C. Although at other times in the play, I am not involved. I'm not sure if I had wanted to be on stage somewhere all the time. If so, I needed to take decisions for every scene. Could I not have occasionally taken part, watching from the wings. I'm not sure what sort of a link I should be. Should I be the outsider always? Should I guide the audience as to how to respond? By facial expressions or mannerisms and hand gestures or such? I suspect the Master of Ceremonies has different roles in different parts of the play. But it's fine line he has to tread.

In Dharan, Saudi Arabia with British Aerospace, we produce Shakespeare's 'Henry the Fourth Part 2'. On bachelor status, I'm finding it frustrating sexually to live alone again. Zeena is alone, too, in Muswell Hill. For compensation, I dive into amateur theatricals again. As a Yawoo Welshman, I'm allocated the part of Gower:

Cue and enter (dressed in tights again) :

GOWER
'The King, my lord, and Harry Prince of Wales
Are near at hand:the rest the paper tells.'

This time, with plenty of spare hours away from teaching English to Saudi pilots, I manage to learn the lines. God help Henry, whose lines are egregiously long.

My second line:

'At Basingstoke, my lord.'

Sometime later, I say:

'No, fifteen hundred foot, five hundred horse
Are march'd up to my Lord of Lancaster
Against Northumberland and the Archbishop.'

And finally:

'I must wait upon my good lord here. I thank you good John.'

I then exit to dine with Falstaff. And back to the compound and my lonely single bed.

A consoling drink of locally made Siddiki. A fetid concoction distilled by the Americans (in dry Saudi!) from sugar. It has to be cut twice with water. It can burn with a blue-like flame. The hangover is a million times worse than from drinking beer. The potion finally sends me

to a much desired sleep until my five o'clock morning call. My first class takes place at six a.m. Zeena comes out on a visit and we are allocated a Company house ostensibly to cat sit. For the owner who is on leave. The cat disappears the following morning. And I am left to explain to the owners where their dear moggy has gone.

George becomes famous on the compound for my possession of sugar. Ever the entrepreneur, I buy a twenty pound sack of sugar in the market and dole it out into smaller consignments for use by the engineers, teachers and pilots on the project. It dates from my days in Dumbarton House School. With sweets still on ration, I buy black market coupons and sell Trebor chews at a 200% mark-up. I don't become rich. And after a further few months in the desert return to London.

Back home and Zeena and I are invited to 'high tea' at May's. She is now in advanced age and obviously finding things difficult, slowing up and forgetful. She puts on alone, John has long ago passed on, a wonderful display of tinned salmon, and cucumber sandwiches, dainty little cup cakes with an icing topping, jelly, custard andhomemadejam. We talk of the old days about Elizabeth, gone too, and our salad days in Stockham's Corner. This was to be the last time we ever saw May. God rest her soul.

Back in Saudi Arabia working for Saudi Arabian Television Channel 2. In those days it was not a question of ordering a dozen of anything. But a hundred. The stuff was pouring in from Japan. Sony – as much as you wanted. Toshiba – as many as you liked. MitsubishiElectricals – no limits. The TV studios were entirely French built, with the Betamax system. It favoured the colour blue over VHS. They had even built and mothballed an entire studio complete with all cameras and control rooms and waiting for further expansion. Roads were built out into the desert going nowhere. Just to use up the money they were receiving from oil exports to the west. Their only use for model airplane and helicopter enthusiasts with their radio controlled units. Or for males learning how to drive.

The studio executives would place a camera in front of you. You would do your piece recorded. It was never live, in case you were tempted to denounce a corrupt, effete and sybariticregime whose hold on power was total. On one radio programme I was going out live.But there was a 'minder' in the studio to cut you off. If you said something considered as controversial. The camera operator would focus on one shot leaving the camera and going off to drink tea in those tiny glass cups so ubiquitous in Arabia. One afternoon I had bathed and shampooed ready for recording. I had the effrontery to appear on camera without a tie in a shirt buttoned up to the throat. I was told by the Saudi officials that this was unacceptable and had to rush back to my apartment in the Centre of Riyadh to change in to a tie.

I recorded out on location on many occasions. Mainly at the football stadiums and the horse racing track. Once, filming outdoors for a natural history programme, I saw this delightful little black and white kitten. I picked him up and petted him on camera.

'At last I'm getting to be Sir David Attenborough', I thought.

The footage was never used. Recording times were frenetic. We were allocated only so much time in the control room to edit and cut the film. It was mostly 35mm but digital was already coming into use.

In 'Schools of Literature' on Radio Riyadh George writes (err, copies) produces, and records a hundred programmes over a few years. There were programmes on Proust, Balzac, Gide, my ancestor Count Leo Tolstoy, (DNArecords available on request) Dostoyevsky, Strindberg, and Brecht. As I mentioned, pronouncing his name Brescht and not Brecht. There were Sartre, Camus, deBeavoir for the Existentialist School. There were Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Heidegger for their German originators.

George features the Anglo-Welsh School of poets, of course, and we did a fine adaptation of 'Under Milk Wood'. Some expatriate friends, a banker, a computer specialist and a scrummy housewife voiced the lovely cadences of LLaregub (bugger all spelled backwards) describing Swansea's 'sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat-bobbing sea.' Dylan Thomas'smasterful 'play for voices' was all about 'besoming',carousing, singing, womanising, making music, drinking, laughing,sleeping and enjoying the beauty of life, despite the threats of the Atomic Bomb at the time.

In a superb piece of free,highly descriptive writing, Dylan Thomas evokes the sleepy, dreamy town where beneath the respectable surface there exist many liaisons, affairs and carryings-on:

'Now, in her iceberg-white, holily laundered crinolinenightgown, under virtuous polar sheets, in her spruced andscoured dust-defying bedroom in trig and trim Bay View, ahouse for paying guests, at the top of the town, MrsOgmore-Pritchard widow, twice, of Mr Ogmore, linoleum, retired, and Mr Pritchard, failed bookmaker, who maddened by besoming, swabbing and scrubbing, the voice of the vacuum-cleaner and the fume of polish, ironically swallowed disinfectant, fidgets in her rinsed sleep, wakes in a dream, and nudges in the ribs dead Mr Ogmore, dead Mr Pritchard, ghostly on either side…'

Mrs Ogmore Pritchard recites:

Open the curtains, light the fire, what are servants for?
I am Mrs Ogmore Pritchard and I want another snooze.
Dust the china, feed the canary, sweep the drawing-room floor;
And before you let the sun in, mind he wipes his shoes.

Then we feature Mrs Pugh with her acid, tart comments about her husband, Mr Pugh: (articulated with precision and cold, hard feeling by the scrummy mummy :)

'Persons with manners do not read at table',

FIRST VOICE
'says Mrs Pugh. She swallows a digestive tablet as big as a horse-pill, washing it down with clouded pea soup water.'

In my most favourite lines it's:

'Organ Morgan, you haven't been listening to a word I said.
It's organ organ all the time with you…'

Follow that! In another programme on the American Realist School, George directs and plays John Steinbeck with the aid of an American expatriate,whose name I now forget. He has a fine, rich, deep, drawling accent.We do the letters from John Steinbeck to Mrs Jacqueline Kennedy, the widow of the American President:

New York

August 20, 1964

Dear Mrs Kennedy,

Forgive, please, my apparent slowness in answering your two letters. The delay arises from a kind of remorseful rethinking. I had no intention of joining the cackling folk who are pulling and pushing and nibbling at you.

You see it was never any plan of mine to rush in while the wound is fresh and while eager memories feed on themselves… A great and brave man belongs to all of us because he activates the little greatness and bravery that sleeps in us. And unfortunately an evilman finds his signals in us also… And you are quite right when you say a book is only a book and he was a man and he is dead…

I wish I could help you although I know not anyone can. I've thought that after all of the required puppetry and titanic control that has been asked of you and given – it might be good and desirable if, like those bereft squaws I spoke of, you could go to a hill and howl out your rage and pain…

When Mrs Jackie Kennedy Onassis finally turned over copies of her letters from Steinbeck she had replied:

Dear Mrs Steinbeck,

I have found the letters of your husband.

I can never express what they meant to me at the time- they helped me face what was unacceptable to me.

You will never know what it meant to me to talk with your husband in those days – I read his letters now- and I am moved as I was then- All his wisdom and compassion, his far seeing view of things- I can't remember the sort of book we were discussing then – but I am glad it

wasn't written. His letters say more than a whole book could – I will treasure them all my life.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

There must have been a great deal of consolation for Jackie Kennedy in those letters from Steinbeck. When one has suffered a great loss at the top there must be a massive loneliness due to the isolation and remoteness of public life in the affairs of State. But the one certain thing about Steinbeck's writings is that 'the creative forces of the human spirit willprevail.'

After a life time of travelling and teaching, it is perhaps the time to sum up George's achievements. What have I learned? There is one certain thing about nations in that you cannot generalise. There were good Frenchmen and some bad Frenchmen – good Saudis and bad Saudis and so on. When I commenced teaching in 1963, we just walked into the classroom and taught – seven lessons a day for 40 minutes each. Now the school day has been reduced to a miserable nine o'clock to three thirty. The amount of paperwork that teachers are expected to do is sapping of their morale and energy to teach in the classroom. Agencies such as OFSTED and QAA expect ridiculous compliance to effete and time consuming quality issues that have no actual relevance to teaching learners. In one recent report we were told that 'The College has enhanced its progression data monitoring tools ahead of new student entry with a new format, making it possible to report on the progression of individualstudents and cohorts.' Gobbledegook!

Figure3 The author after a ‘gunging' in Riyadh.

Figure 3The author on the Thames near Windsor.

Figure 4 Nineteen-thirties young ladies having their photo taken with a 'Brownie' camera.

Figure 5My niece in TV's 'Stella'.

Figure 6 The author.

Figure 7 Paddling in the rock pools.