

Chapter 2

Peace In Our Time

With the war over I thought now would be a good time to ask my parents for a drum. No such luck! Then I had a bright idea, it was simple, too obvious for words, join the Boy Scouts! Since the streets had become safe to walk along they had also become chock-a-block with bands marching back and forth, celebrating anything worth celebrating and I'd noticed some of the bands were made up of boys my own age. They were playing lovely polished brass drums with white tension ropes hanging from them, they looked great to me and I knew that when the Scoutmaster discovered how well I could tap out the rhythms it would be a matter of course to provide me with a drum. What could be simpler? I would polish my brass drum better than anybody in the world and I would blanco its ropes until they made everybody else's ropes look positively grey!

Alas I had somewhat overestimated my abilities, or rather I had underestimated Lord Baden-Powell's requirements because instead of giving me a drum, the Scoutmaster insisted I make some effort to become a Boy Scout. Well I need hardly mention here that nothing, absolutely nothing a boy is required to do to achieve this unique distinction was of the slightest interest to me. Tracking, camping running, jumping and similar activities were an anathema to me, I had enough of the latter forced on me at school never mind doing it in my own time, and as for tying knots or learning how to light a fire without matches, well what can I tell you? Let's say my heart wasn't in it. Without boyish enthusiasm these things were completely beyond my capabilities, I failed to achieve even the tenderfoot level and after the briefest of flirtations with scouting I left.

It was at around this time little girls began propositioning me with their, "I'll show you mine if you show me yours." ploy.

I saw no reason to refuse, I was always willing to break off from whatever I was doing to indulge them in this curiously feminine peccadillo, I would drop my pants and show them my paraphernalia then they would drop their knickers and pull up their frocks to show me theirs. We would then put our clothes back in order and I would continue doing whatever it was that I was doing before the interruption had taken place. It was at this point that I felt I had somehow been cheated, I hadn't seen anything! Never, on any occasion that a little girl made this bargain with me, did I catch a glimpse of anything! They stood with their legs together, at the top of which was a triangle where their tummy and legs converged and that was it! That was all I ever saw! I was mystified? True, I didn't know what I was looking for? I didn't even know what I wasn't seeing! I was not upset by this curious activity, my libido had not yet raised his bothersome head, but I had a vague feeling that somehow I was being conned.

My libido was actually woken by a boy and not in the way you might be thinking either, slightly older than myself he lived nearby and attended 'Taunton Grammar School' one of Southampton's 'posher' seats of learning. Being close neighbours, in spite of our different backgrounds it was inevitable that we would make contact sooner or later. One day we climbed a tree on a nearby bomb-site and when we reached the top we made ourselves comfortable in a fork among the branches and surveyed the world below us. "I know how to make sperm!" he said suddenly, I stared at him uncomprehending. "You know, what you make babies with!" he went on. "Oh that!" I bluffed, wondering what was coming next, my libido may have still been asleep but my ego was wide awake, I was not going to let him know that I hadn't the faintest idea what he was talking about. "Yes," he went on, "you rub your dick, and you keep on rubbing until all of a sudden this white stuff squirts out of it!" "Really?" I said, my innocence

finally showing. "Yeah," he said, "you try it when you get home." I was interested, not aroused, but interested and the conversation moved to other topics, however I'd become intrigued, I wanted to go home to try it and eventually I made my excuses and went.

When I got there I went straight into the toilet to try out his assertion, merely to see if what he said was true, I made a brief attempt at it but nothing happened. When I saw him again I told him so, "It was just as I thought," I said, "a load of rubbish!" "Did you pull your foreskin back?" he asked, "No." I replied. "Well there you are then!" he exclaimed, "There's your reason, you've got to rub under that." Now I was truly intrigued, I wasn't even aware it pulled back? I went home to have another try.

Locking myself in the outside toilet, I kicked off my pants and pulled on my foreskin in an attempt to retract it over the end of my penis. on doing so I discovered regretfully that it would not budge. I tried harder and discovered that indeed it might well have come back had the hole at the end not been so small, it was only big enough to pee through. However, I had caught a glimpse of something under there and could see the inherent possibility. I pulled harder, it was really painful but my curiosity was boundless, by now I was in way beyond a hint of retreat.

I was also in a singularly curious situation, I had discovered a part of me which I knew nothing about and now I really needed to know more, it had become vitally important, I had to get this curious little band of skin back over the end of my dick for heaven's sake!

I finally managed the seemingly impossible and was astonished when finally I succeeded. I had revealed a bright pink bulb curiously shaped like a roman helmet, I was filled with wonder!

This painfully prolonged struggle had naturally enough caused my penis to become engorged, I was not alarmed by this phenomenon, I had experienced it before, albeit for no apparent reason. Every day of my life except for routine Friday evening bath-time, my mother washed me all over from head to foot, standing me in the kitchen sink to do so. At such times whenever my penis became erect I would panic and cry out, "Look Mummy, it's got a bone in it!" she would laugh and say, "Yes, but don't worry about it son, it's only your teapot, it will soon go away." and she carried on washing me as if nothing was amiss and she was inevitably proved right, it subsided without ill effects. Well I figured if she wasn't worried about it it must be safe, so I too grew accustomed to the phenomenon and eventually ignored it. This time however as the appendage grew larger so the pain increased and I realised with increasing horror that this could well turn into a real bloody disaster. Literally! As my penis swelled, the tight band of skin suddenly seemed in danger of tearing, or maybe even cutting off the pink bulb. In a panic I tried to push it back where it had come from, but by now the pink bulb was so swollen the band of skin was caught fast behind it. I was still struggling to return it when suddenly to my surprise it popped back almost entirely of it's own accord.

My relief was palpable but so was my curiosity. As frightening and frustrating as all this was, I was totally fascinated by my discoveries. They were truly amazing, the skin really did pull back and the pink helmet beneath it was a revelation. I also discovered that the skin beneath this strange hood while unbelievably tender was also very pleasant to the touch, too sore to probe further, I abandoned the project for the present but I knew I had found something important and I would be returning to it very soon. Suffice to say I did succeed eventually, it wasn't easy nor was it achieved quickly and it involved suffering a sore penis plus a lacerated foreskin for rather longer than I care to think about. It also took quite a while for the beleaguered prepuce to stretch and become permanently elastic, meanwhile I had uncovered a source of great personal pleasure, not to mention the veracity of my friend's outrageous claim. It also reminded me that the unlikely assertion made by my red-headed informant at West Meon Village School had actually been true! The realisation of the full implications of this preposterous truth dawned on me and my jaw fell open, "My God, so grown-ups do actually do that! Oh Jesus I can't

believe it!” I screamed silently, totally dumbfounded.

As I type these words no puns are intended, but several nice ones spring to the fingertips. For instance my first orgasm came as a shock. Well of course it did, that's exactly what it felt like, an electric shock, emanating from a central point somewhere deep between my legs, it burned along my urethra spreading through the rest of my body like sparks from a giant fire-cracker. I was enthralled, delighted with this wondrous discovery and tried to make it happen again however my penis refused to rise to the occasion, shrinking rapidly, it lost all interest in the project and nothing I could do could rekindle it. Disappointed I gave up, promising myself I would return to the task in the very near future.

Of course at this point my libido awoke and puberty along with it, I began to look at girls in an entirely new light. I also began to grow hair in the silliest places, under my arms, on my legs and would you believe around my recently discovered tickly bits! The latter I found too embarrassing for words and from this moment onward I refused to allow my parents to see me naked, even in the bath. My mother was angry about this, she felt she should and indeed had the right to continue washing me from head to foot including my teapot as she called it. Mum was really upset at my resistance, however I could no longer allow this, the amusing little appendage now became erect at the drop of a hat, well at the touch of a warm flannel to be more precise and I felt as guilty as hell about it though I had no idea why. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that my new found private excitement was extremely naughty and therefore was surely forbidden. I suppose in my naivety I thought things that were discussed quite openly by little boys behind the school bicycle shed, should be kept from the ears of innocent adults. I lived in constant terror that one day my mother would catch me at it but she never did. However, early one morning real disaster struck, I had my first wet dream! At first awakening I thought it a wonderful experience, and lay smiling smugly to myself, sadly I don't remember the details of the dream, what on earth could possibly go on in an eleven year old virgin's subconscious, while asleep, which would produce such an effect? Presumably a young boy's erotic imaginings could only be spawned by silly nudge nudge wink wink playground talk, or is it deeper than that? Would it occur anyway without any outside help? I didn't know the answer then and I don't know it now. What I do recall however, was the effect it had on me at the time.

I awoke smiling and ironically slightly disappointed by this exceptionally pleasant episode, I recall that whatever I was doing at the time, I never actually finished doing it. That is to say, I experienced a dream induced premature ejaculation, hence my disappointment, but I was still very excited by the experience. My joy was short lived however, when to my utter horror I found my belly wet with semen. Even worse, my pyjamas were covered with the stuff. I freaked completely, “Oh my God! What will mum say when she sees this?” I thought.

Blind panic took over, unable to risk allowing her to find them in this state I got out of bed removed them and wiped my belly dry with them. Now they were really a mess. “Christ I'm going to have to wash the bloody things before she finds out!” I thought, “Oh Dear Jesus I knew it was wrong when I started doing this, I knew it was too good to last, I knew I would be punished for something as pleasant as this! Shit, how am I going to wash them without her finding out, she'll see me doing it and ask why?” I couldn't risk that, I was having enough trouble over my refusal to allow her to bathe me, I was not allowed to use the bathtub by myself because although the war was over, the use of water was still restricted and that was her reason for standing me in the kitchen sink in the first place. Now, stuck with a pair of pyjamas I dare not let her find, I had to clean them without her knowledge. Time was also of the essence, I had until it was time to go to school to perform the task! I thought fast, where would I dry them? In the airing cupboard? No choice anyway, do it and keep my fingers crossed. I decided to just wash the stains because then drying them would not be such a major issue. I managed to do this and

popped them in the airing cupboard, as planned. I was scared that when she made my bed she'd wonder where my pyjamas were, but could think of no alternative and went off to school.

I was not a happy little Vegemite, concentration on my work was even more difficult than usual and even playtime was difficult to enjoy. I prayed for four o'clock to come and when it did I rushed home. "Hello Darling," called mum as I raced into the house, "you're home early!" "Yeah," I shouted, "I've got an upset tummy, gotta dash to the loo, I won't be a moment!"

I didn't go to the toilet of course but ran instead to the airing cupboard and there, still undiscovered, perched where I had left them, were my pyjamas, my relief was so intense I never gave a thought as to why she hadn't noticed their absence when she made my bed.

Life continued as before but now masturbation was a large part of it. Little girls continued to con me into showing them mine while never actually letting me see theirs, only now I was deeply interested in whatever it was they were not showing me. I really felt I was being seriously deprived of whatever it was I was not seeing and my dissatisfaction made absolutely no difference, I never did catch a glimpse of it. This aroused my curiosity still further. Which I now realise was mother nature's object in the first place.

I had no such aged wisdom back then and one day, whilst acting out some childish Tarzan or Superman fantasy deep in a triangle of woodland close to my home, Sheila, a neighbourhood girl found me hiding in a small hollow bush and she climbed in beside me.

She propositioned me in the usual way and I agreed, with even more enthusiasm than before I dropped my pants and showed her mine and when she showed me hers, it was a revelation, this time there was a marked difference, her triangle was covered with hair! "Ah-hah! So that's what it is!" I thought, finally satisfied. I was excited by this new and novel experience, satisfied that this time that I'd finally caught a glimpse of something I shouldn't have. "Success at last!" I carolled.

Her disclosure increased my masturbation rate and it was some time before I realised that again she had revealed nothing! I still had not the remotest idea what lay between her legs? Neither she nor any of the girls had ever revealed anything, apart from their bare tummies that is and as ever, I was walking away with the feeling I'd been conned. I couldn't put my finger on it and I realise now (in my dotage) that it might have helped a great deal if I had.

A group of about six of us neighbourhood boys and girls took to hiding in the bushes to play these games together, Group pre-sex I suppose you could call it. We never touched each other, only looked, and the girls stuck to their circumspect practice, so I never did find the answer. By the time I was old enough to fathom it out, the game was over, girls no longer offered the privilege of looking without seeing, and don't even think about touching!

It had been a game played by eleven to thirteen year olds, after that the mystery deepened and they stopped offering even the smallest favours, the whole business became far more difficult.

If you'll excuse another pun.

Apart from the arrival of puberty, life continued inexorably to unfold and I was struck with another brilliant idea. In the house opposite my own and adjacent to the small triangle of woodland mentioned above lived a Mr White, he was the leader of the local 'Boy's Brigade' and it dawned on me that failing to become a Boy Scout was no great obstacle, the answer was living right across the street! I waited at my garden gate until I saw him arrive home on his bicycle at which point I approached him. "Excuse me Mr White," I said, "I would like to join the Boy's Brigade." "Of course!" he said, "No problems there young Ken, I'll come and see your parents this evening and have a chat to them about it?"

"Oh they wont mind." I said quite truthfully. "Well I'd better check a few details with them anyway." he maintained.

At the time I was unaware that The Boys Brigade was a Church Of England organisation, it had never occurred to me that he might need to check on whether I was Jewish, or Catholic or Muslim or whatever? I had no idea what I was, I would never have been able to tell him if he'd asked me! God was not a subject ever raised at home and at school whenever religious lessons or prayers were scheduled the teacher merely said, "Jews and Catholics may leave the room if they wish." at this announcement several of my mates would get up and file out and I never understood why? Come to that, I never understood a single word of the lessons either, they were as mysterious to me as mathematics. I sat in silent incomprehension as stories about strange foreign lands full of unfamiliar people riding about on their asses. (which raised a smile, may I add) Words like 'thee, thou, thy and Yea verily unto me' were intoned and I wondered why these people couldn't talk properly. However, tales of people begetting people intrigued me, one man actually begat someone. Whatever that meant? "Perhaps it's a bit like garrotting?" I reflected, although I'd never heard of anyone being garrat?

Tales of disasters which had occurred eons ago had no special meaning for me, why should I care what happened to a bunch of Jews, Egyptians and Romans two thousand years ago? As far as I was concerned these stories were accounts of someone else's problems and were irrelevant to me. I had enough war and pestilence of my own to deal with, why the hell should I care what happened in the affairs of people in other countries two thousand years ago? "I'll bet the bastards never had aircraft screaming overhead with guns blazing and bombs exploding round their arses every day for five years! What could they have known about real terror?" I thought bitterly and payed no further attention to any of 'em. I still don't know why I didn't get up and leave when the Jews and Catholics walked out? I suppose I stayed because nobody told me to do otherwise.

Mr White came and questioned my parents as promised and of course they had no objections. I joined then and there, while he was in the house, there were no initiation tests, no courses to study, no badges to be strived for, you wanted to join? Okay, so join, just like that, no problems! I was in! When I arrived on my first evening I was disappointed to find that not only were there no problems, there was no band either! I had not thought to ask about that when I joined up. I expressed concern over this and Mr White said, "Well Ken, It's funny you should raise this subject, because our appeal for a grant to buy the fifes and drums has just been granted and the instruments are due to arrive very soon." He turned to the rest of the boys, "We've all been waiting very patiently haven't we lads?" there was a general murmur of assent, "Well don't worry, they shouldn't be very much longer." he concluded. I accepted the news stoically and began to wait along with the other boys, I can't claim I did so with any real patience, but so long as I was going to get a drum I could wait a few more days. I was cheered by the uplifting thought that at last all my dreams, yearnings and longings were about to be realised. A few weeks went by and nothing happened, I began to seriously doubt the man's word, when suddenly there they were, one evening I walked into the church hall that we used as our headquarters and stacked on a trestle table were the drums and fifes. Needless to say I had eyes only for the drums. I had already picked the one I was going to play when Mr White entered the room, beamed and said, "Well lads, at last the day has dawned eh!" He raised his arm and pointed to some of the boys, "You, you, you, you, you, you, you and you, get yourselves a fife each." Then swinging his arm in an arc to another group he said, "And you, you, you, and you, get yourselves a side drum. And you," he added, pointing to the tallest boy, "you play the bass drum!"

I couldn't believe it, I'd been passed over! I raised my arm in the time honoured tradition, "Er... Mr White," I began, "I mentioned some weeks ago that I joined the Brigade so that I could play a drum," I said, "and I really would like a drum please." "Ah!" he said, "I've got something much more exciting for you Ken, you are so small that we have decided you will make the perfect Drum-Major!" I was

devastated. “No!” I said adamantly, “Why can't you understand? I don't want to be a Drum-Major, I want to be a drummer!” “Look son,” he said, picking up an ornate silver-knobbed mace and holding it out towards me, “I'm offering you the best chance you'll ever get. I am offering you leadership!” “All the best Drum-Majors are small!” he added as an afterthought. I became desperate, “NO! I want to play a drum, I don't want to be a leader, I just want to play a drum!” I cried, “But don't you understand Ken? You'll be the chap who walks in front of the band swinging the mace and tossing it into the air! Everyone will admire you! Now take the mace outside on the grass and practice.” he thrust the thing into my face. I turned away, bitterly disappointed, I'd been so close this time. “I'm going outside alright, Mister White,” I snarled, “and I won't be coming back!” and so saying, I walked out of the Boy's Brigade forever and still no nearer my goal.

Existence is many things happening at once, it would be easier if we could live it as we write it, separate chapters one page at a time, however this is not how life is scheduled, we must deal with a myriad important things all at the same time. Particularly difficult when we're young, because everything is of paramount importance and extremely urgent. Drums were important but I also desperately needed a bicycle! All my friends had bicycles and I had learned to ride on their machines, but I needed one of my own and I needed it like a two hundred pound parrot needs a cracker: “Polly wants a cracker, and I want it **NOW!**”

Actually, the story of my learning to ride was an adventure in itself and well worth recounting here. Watching neighbouring kids ride their bicycles was frustrating and of course I asked my parents if I could have one, the answer was an emphatic. “No!” Again it wasn't just the money, once more my mother's over zealous protective instinct had reared it's ugly head. “They're too dangerous!” she exclaimed, “I'm not having you riding about out there among the traffic!” Fair enough some of you might say, that's not as crazy as you make out. Well maybe not, but I couldn't agree with her, this was not the first time her over zealous caution had interfered with my well being, I was absolutely certain she was wrong when the school issued me with a form requesting parental permission for me to go to Southampton Lido once a week for swimming lessons. “It's too dangerous!” she said, “You'll drown!” I was appalled, “I'll drown if I don't learn to swim, mum!” I argued, however argument was useless, I never did learn to swim and still can't, although much later in life I found it necessary to pay to learn at least enough to keep myself alive in the water until help came. Nowadays here in Australia, it is comforting to watch my grandchildren being taught almost from the day they were born.

My plea for a bicycle was equally useless so I had to cheat, what else is there? As soon as my friends and I were out of sight of the house one of them would say, “Here you are Ken, have a go on mine.” and I would take the proffered machine and try to stay upright on it. There was no way I could do that! I tried and tried but to no avail. The main reason was my size, I was so small that I could not get astride the larger machines and had to resort to putting one leg through the frame to reach the pedal on the other side. Unless it was a ladies bike in which case they didn't have a crossbar so I was fractionally better off, but they were rare, besides, little girls were not keen to lend boys their bikes. Either way I found it impossible to remain upright on any of the damn things. I got on one side and toppled straight off the other, I took to scooting along, with one foot on the pedal while pushing myself along with the other but I wasn't very happy with the result.

Adjoining my street was Athelston Road, a fairly gentle slope, it ran downhill for quite a while and then levelled out nicely at the bottom, an ideal place to learn to ride out of sight of my mother. I pushed the bike to the top and then rolled down the slope in the scooting position, which was fun but not good enough, I wanted to get up on the damned thing properly, however each time I did I fell off and ended up a bruised tangle of sore arms, bicycle wheels and grazed knees. Children are resilient if nothing else,

I got back on and tried again and again and even yet again and suddenly with no warning and with no help from me whatsoever the bicycle inexplicably stayed upright!

I was ecstatic, I had no idea what I had done to cause this crash through the 'stay erect' barrier, the machine simply ran down the hill with me perched up on it! All my mates cheered and jumped around me as though I had scored the winning goal at the FA cup match, I had mastered it. I was one of the guys!

It was now vital that I acquire a bicycle of my own but Mum put her foot down, "Definitely not! And if I ever catch you riding someone else's you'll not be allowed out to play at all!" she concluded. It was Arthur Cove who came to my rescue, his parents had bought him a second hand bike and his dad showed us how to take it to pieces, clean it, oil it put it back together and fit new brake blocks to it, in short he made sure it was safe for us to use while at the same time teaching us how to maintain it. The important feature of this particular machine, from my point of view anyway, was the rear pannier, a sturdy flat metal tray designed to be used to strap parcels onto, Arthur and I didn't waste time with parcels, I sat on it! From this position I could reach the pedals and they were just wide enough to take both Arthur's feet and my own, we were the fastest kids on the block, ah, forget the block, we were the fastest kids in town, totally unbeatable! I was so excited by this new concept that it cured my lust for a bike of my own. The arrangement had several advantages the first being fun, Arthur and I tore through the streets at a far greater speed than would have been feasible on separate machines and secondly it proved to be a financial boon, my mother was under the impression that I was going to school on the tram so every morning she gave me the fare, I walked around the corner to the Bullar Road tram terminus and waited. At the appointed time, Arthur would arrive on his bike, I would hop on the back and we would race the tram to Bitterne Park Triangle.

We won and I had saved the fare money, so we spent it on custard tarts served piping hot from the 'Triangle Cake Shop.' I once swung one of these wobbly tarts around in the air to cool it down and the custard stayed where it was, I ended up staring into an empty pastry case as I heard the custard splodge onto the ground behind me. The cake shop lady laughed uproariously and gave me another one, free of charge! As for our race with the tram, we didn't have to stop to pick up passengers so we always won. Boys will be boys and we soon became bored with this routine so we handicapped ourselves by devising a more circuitous route around the backstreet's, we still arrived before the tram.

Another great advantage was that normally I alighted from the tram at the Triangle and walked the rest of the way to school, quite a distance, close on a mile I'd say, but as it was no longer necessary we had some time to spare and time can always be put to good use when you are an eleven year old boy. Arthur and I found some routes that were much more fun and more profitable too, like the footpath that ran alongside the river bank from Cobden Bridge to the school sports field. This public foot-way led past the council rubbish tip and you have no idea how many unopened packets of Wrigley's chewing gum, Lifesavers, Chocolate Hershey Bars, cans of Coca-Cola and cookies, the then still in residence American armed services discarded. There was tons of the stuff, much of it in unopened boxes still sealed in khaki waterproof, wax covered cartons in fact. We had been deprived of these things for years, were still being deprived of them for Christ's sake! We had been informed that rationing would continue for some time so we were not at all worried about scavenging among the rubbish, we knew what to look for! In the afternoon after school was over we could go there again, or anywhere we chose, no hill was too steep, no distance too far! Of course for a while my mum insisted that I go straight home, I suppose to reassure herself that I had survived yet another hazardous day.

I did as she asked, Arthur dropped me off nearby, then waited for me round the corner, I dashed into the house bellowing, "Hello Mum, can I go out to play?" After inspecting me minutely for any damage she

would say, "Alright, off you go, but be back for six o'clock tea-time." I then dashed around the corner to Arthur where I hopped onto his pannier and the world was once again our oyster.

We were normal mischievous boys, we did all the so called naughty things boys of our age did and throwing stones and breaking windows was no exception, always a fascination, we no longer did it out of spite, nor did we even have the remotest notion that the windows belonged to some poor soul, we simply had to see which one of us could break the most. It was a points game.

One morning, behind a local general store, close to Bitterne Railway station, we came upon a row of warehouse doors open to the sun. The door therefore presented us with a row of window panes through which, with accuracy, it might be possible to throw a stone, thus breaking a whole row with but a single stone.

The challenge was there and we could not resist, we set to with gusto and here it was that the as yet unrecognised and unnamed syndrome of 'Arrison's Law re-asserted itself.

We had broken several of the panes without true success and I was about to make the supreme effort when a voice said, "Ullo Ullo Ullo! Wot's a goin' on 'ere then me lads?"

It was a bloody policeman! It was a fair cop, he took us into the store owner who did his conkers and of course said he would press charges for the recovery of the cost of the damage. The policeman asked for our names and addresses and it was no good lying, the storekeeper knew who we were. The cop promised he would call on our parents that evening and he let us go. My day was ruined, unable to relax I made my way home. I thought the best thing to do was own up, if I told mum what had happened she would go crazy and belt me round the ear but at least it would be over and done with, by the time the policeman arrived she would know what to do. I walked into the house to be greeted by her joyfully crowing that she had been very brave that morning. She had recently developed agoraphobia and she had chosen today to go shopping. "I went out all by myself!" she boasted, "While I was at the shops I thought about what a good boy you've been lately so I bought you a present." and she presented me with a colouring book, a paintbrush and a box of watercolour paints. I was compromised, the timing was all wrong. I was now unable to bring myself to tell her of my dark deed, the confession would have killed this rare tender moment and would also have destroy her private bravery not to mention her generous act. My feeling of guilt was palpable and stayed that way until the policeman called late in the afternoon. After he had gone, mum's look of reproach was more than enough, the guilt remained with me for months and I found myself unable to use the painting set. Not because she took from me, but because I felt very strongly that I didn't deserve it and therefore could not enjoy it.

Late one afternoon after school, Arthur and I dared each other we would not climb over the parapet of Bitterne Railway bridge to stand on the narrow ledge as a train passed under us. We both accepted the challenge and performed this foolhardy and dangerous act, giggling as the black smoke billowed around us temporarily blocking out the sun. We had planned to climb back over the wall after the train passed beneath us and then continue on our way rejoicing but alas I was too short. I found I couldn't pull myself back to safety, my fingers only just reached the top of the wall and the ledge my feet were resting on was not wide enough to enable to jump upwards and take a firmer hold. I had not foreseen any of this, panic set in, Arthur tried to help me but he wasn't much taller himself and in desperation we finally agreed the only thing to do was to let go the wall and drop to the ground. It was a bloody long way to fall but sensibly we edged our way along the wall until we were over the top of the steep grassy embankment before launching ourselves into space.

Fortunately we were only knocked breathless as we rolled down the bank to the bottom. We picked ourselves up bruised and shaken and in less than two minutes had our breath back and were screaming with relieved laughter, nevertheless I knew I would never perform such a foolish prank again.

When I arrived home my mother went ballistic. “What the hell have you been up to!” she demanded, grabbing me by the scruff of my neck. “Nothing Mum!” I said, surprised at her action and wondering how she could possibly have known. “Don't lie to me my son! I know you too well!” she said, “I've heard all about it, come on, tell me your side of the story, what have you've been doing?” I owned up and got a belt around the ear-hole. “How did you know anyway?” I wailed when she finally let me go, “Well, look at the bloody state of you!” she exclaimed pushing me in front of a mirror. I looked like Al Jolson!

My only interest in life apart from these harmless pranks was music. Arthur though, had a much broader canvass and he roped me into his world. We had instant transport to anywhere and no suburb was too far away. It was he who awoke in me an interest in Southampton's history. Originally a walled city, I had been unaware of this until he took me on a guided tour of the ruins.

Hidden among the recent bomb damage were the real ruins, large sections of the ancient walls remained standing. Obviously it took more than bombs to destroy a Norman wall, in this instance I think time had done more damage than the Germans. In truth I really don't know how much of the wall, or how many beautiful historic buildings inside the walls, were destroyed by the bombs, but there were some left and Arthur Cove knew his way around all of them. We traced the remains of the old wall from The Bargate to The Mayflower Memorial, in both directions, east to west and vice-versa. Until that moment I had always regarded 'The Bargate' as something ornamental, an archway the local council had built there for the trams to run through. Eventually the trams were directed around the ancient edifice in order to cut down the damage the vibration of their passage was causing it.

We visited 'Tudor House' which of course was a museum even then, sometimes spending all day enjoying it's many treasures. He introduced me to other historical buildings, dotted like pearls among the pig-shit of the heaped ruins of the shattered town.

Behind Tudor House and close to the Mayflower Memorial, was King John's Palace and Below Bar in the High Street, The Red Lion Hotel was still intact. During the reign of King Henry the eighth it had been a courthouse, unfortunately because it was now a pub, we were not allowed inside it but we opened the door and had a peep, it was well preserved and in fact still looked like a medieval courthouse in those days. It is still well looked after or it was the last time I saw it. Close by Tudor House was Saint Michael's Church, a completely intact Norman church. Other similar treasures dotted the bleak and shattered landscape and Arthur knew all their secrets. In 'Tudor House' for instance he knew where the secret locks were on some of the iron chests and would push one of the rivets aside to activate a spring catch, whereupon a small hidden escutcheon sprang open to reveal the real keyhole. I went there recently and noticed it is now worn shiny and very loose because thousands of people have since discovered the secret. Fifty five years ago it was far more difficult to discern. I was captivated by these fascinating revelations and Arthur helped push my interests into other areas but I still knew I was going to be a jazz drummer, my resolve was unswerving.

In spite of all this talk of timeless historical treasures I must stress that like it or not, nothing lasts for ever, well not in a personal sense that is, especially for people like us. My family had no home of our own and it was only a matter of time before Stan Best, our landlord by force of circumstance, would want to move back into his own house, after all, it was his and the war was over. He asked us politely to move elsewhere, but unfortunately there was nowhere else to go, our home at number one Spring Road was still a gutted shell, unable to comply with his wishes we continued to live in his house, therefore he was forced to obtain a court order and have us forcibly removed.

There was really nothing personal involved, his hand was as much directed toward the local authorities as to us but my mother's mental health, never robust at the best of times, took a turn for the worse.

Understandably under that kind of pressure she took it rather more personally than was intended, She developed and nurtured a deep hatred for the people forced to evict her, she became depressed and spiteful, her paranoia grew and cemented itself into her psyche. My father went to the judicial hearing and of course came home with the news that the court had predictably decided in Stan Best's favour, we had until the coming weekend to get out or be forcibly evicted by the police. Mum was panic stricken, "What are we gonna do Bert? Where shall we go? What about Ken? How will I look after him?" she repeated over and over ad infinitum, all day and all bloody night.

I've no idea how he found it, but Dad came home the next day with the news that we were moving to a house in Luton Road, Sholing, a suburb on the eastern fringe of the city. Actually it was better for him, Sholing was easier to travel to and from the foundry in Woolston than from Bitterne Park, although it must be said Southampton was not a vast urban sprawl and bus services were excellent, even so Sholing was more convenient and he was happy about the move. Not I though, the move was an entirely different matter for me, thrown into the all too familiar pattern of moving to a different borough and therefore another school I could see disaster ahead and I objected violently. "Christ, not another bloody school! Not another change and more time spent in grade three while they assess my capabilities!" I complained. Besides, and more to the point, I was having a great time at Bitterne Park Senior School. Why would I want to leave?

I told my parents that I wanted to stay on at BPSS and to my great surprise they agreed with me. I informed Miss Corps of my desire and my parents agreement and she also agreed, which I found equally surprising, I thought she'd have been glad to see the back of me. She in turn, passed the information on to Mister Coare, the headmaster, who interviewed me. I explained that I bitterly regretted never having had a consistent education and I resented this latest interruption as it would once again set me back. "I will end up in another bloody lower grade until they can assess my capa-bloody-bilities sir!" I declared with sardonic passion. "Tsk tsk tsk! That's more than enough of that kind of language, Harrison!" he admonished, "But I do agree with you, I think you have a very good case and I will make the necessary enquiries with The Board Of Education." This time the court decided in my favour, I was allowed to stay on at my present school, which meanwhile had been upgraded, becoming Bitterne Park Secondary Modern School.

It was a fancy title which personally I took with a large pinch of salt, I was born with a cynical bent and it had been honed on thirteen years of sheer madness, endowing me with a somewhat jaundiced eye. When Mr Coare proudly announced to the school that it's name was to be changed and the curriculum extended to include The Higher School Certificate I knew it would make no difference to me. I was thirteen years old and still in form five, three grades from the top and from most children my age. I knew I would rise no further, as far as I could assess, the sixth form was for normal bright kids, achieving good results over a range of subjects and the upper sixth was for the especially bright. I would never make it to either. I was aware of my limitations, by no means backward, nor even below average intelligence, quite the contrary in fact I knew the best I could achieve on the all important maths paper would be to write my name and the date at the top. My spelling, grammar and handwriting wouldn't help either. My school reports were consistently sprinkled with comments like:

'Kenneth is an intelligent boy who takes no interest in maths at all and no amount of effort on the teacher's part seems conducive to changing his attitude.'

Whereas my English results drew comments like:

'Kenneth has a lively imagination and excellent composition, but more attention must be paid to punctuation, spelling, grammar, etc etc etc.'

It was a nice way of rubbing my ego, but I had no illusions about getting through my HSC exams. As

the years had passed, not one of my teachers had ever succeeded in unravelling the mysteries of the simplest form of arithmetic, never mind mathematics and don't even mention higher math like algebra and logarithms. By this time I'd achieved a transcendental meditative shutdown on the subject and the teachers wisely let me be. They too had given up and were right to do so, any attempt to stimulate me would have driven me further into myself.

There was a dyslexic boy in my class who could never learn to read, after a while the teachers stopped asking him to stand up and try, except one, a Mr Wandlass, who sometimes asked him if he would like to have a go? If the boy felt like saying yes he was encouraged, but if he demurred he was left in peace, neither of us were bullied or terrorised because of our ineptitude. It was just as well really because with the arrival of puberty my numerical inability had become a male ego problem. In the first instance, when aged six and unable to admit I had cheated by stealing money to pay someone to do my sums for me, I had left myself without the basic grounding. As time wore on, the problems became more advanced and the more difficult it was for me to follow them, consequentially the more confused I became. Eventually my circuits closed down completely and with the onset of puberty came male pride which would not permit me to ask for help and so I became immobilised, I sat in the class but could not take part. Most teachers were tolerant of my blind spot, all except one that is.

There is a feminist school of thought today which espouses the theory that male ego and pride is a load of conditioned bullshit. I only wish it were so, unfortunately it is not, it is very real and if mishandled by these arty-farty factionists, it can become severely debilitating for the young men involved and in some cases very dangerous. For example, world history is replete with ignominious leaders, deadly strutting psychopathic peacocks who, though responsible for the deaths of millions, are really only little boys standing on metaphoric soap boxes beating their chests while playing childish war games with real guns and tanks. What I am saying is Hitler and Churchill played real chess, with real people as the pieces. It is not only the males who are misguided in this deadly sport, regrettably there are always the grown up 'little girls' who line the streets when the victorious tanks roll by, they wave their little flags, smile coquettishly and say, "You are the brave victor, if you show me yours I will show you mine!" and It doesn't matter who that victor might be I may add, to the victor go the spoils. The child remains alive in all of us and becomes deadly in these awful circumstances. Maybe, at best, it's all part of nature's plan, a culling programme followed by the mating dance, combining the means to reduce the numbers with the need to replenish.

I mentioned in passing a teacher unique in that he was the only person in all of my school years to strike me in the face because I could not do my sums or understand figures. It was at Bitterne Manor Junior School, where he called me out to his desk and held my maths paper up to my nose. "Why the hell can't you do this, you stupid little fool?" he cried. I froze and stood in front of him mute with terror, I didn't know the answer either. Inexplicably, he raised his right arm and swung it at my face, it was a vicious blow to the side of my head, making my left ear ring and lacerating the inside of my mouth. As his hand struck home I tasted fresh blood in my mouth. I was dumbfounded, in the past I had accepted corporal punishment for my misdemeanors, often it was deserved, I misbehaved quite deliberately from time to time and was rapped over the knuckles with a ruler for my trouble. However, subjected to this savage brutality and in the light of the circumstances, then as now I could not understand what he hoped to gain from such an attack? Was it supposed to knock some knowledge into me? "I'll knock some bloody sense into you, my boy!" was a phrase I was familiar with, but I had always taken it in the manner in which it was delivered, nobody really believed such a thing was effective, yet here was a teacher attempting the impossible. I remained mute and stared at him disdainfully, daring him to repeat his foolishness. He glared back at me for a few seconds then averting his eyes, snorted, "Oh go and sit

down for heaven's sake!"

I returned to my seat and stared unblinking at his eyes for the rest of the lesson. My ego was scarred but not cowed, from that moment on we never again acknowledged each other's existence, we chose instead to ignore each other completely, he never picked on me again, nor did he ever asked me another question, I in turn never offered a comment nor ever raised my hand during any lesson he subsequently took my class for, maths or otherwise. We became like two insects trapped in amber. Shortly after this incident he gave up the teaching profession and went into politics, eventually becoming the Speaker of the House of Commons. "Yeah, the perfect bloody job for the bastard, headmaster of the greatest rabble in the land!" I thought sourly. His name was Ralph Morley.

The brutish Morley incident aside, on reflection I now feel that it was my generation who lost their way in the sixties, we thought we were smart, we thought personal freedom was everything, we believed we had found a better way, but results have proved disappointing. I urge the young people who are now in charge of their and their children's destinies to rethink the entire situation. I am not against reasonable corporal punishment, the lack of it certainly has not produced any improvement to our civilisation, certainly not the improvement my generation had hoped for, the so called western world is not a better place since we stopped smacking naughty children.

I can't speak for other cultures, although some I could name are very well behaved indeed, rather too much so perhaps. Nor am I suggesting for a moment that you beat your children unmercifully. Of course not, unbridled savagery is not to be tolerated, moderation in all things is still a fair credo I would say, but in most western cities you have lost the streets to teenage louts who presumably have been brought up to believe they can do anything they like without fear of retribution. It might be time for you to review the situation we so foolishly created for you.

While on the same subject and again the Ralph Morley incident notwithstanding, I think I deserved the corporal punishment I received. At the schools I attended, apart from cuffs, raps on the knuckles and mild slaps from teachers for rudeness or disobedience, the hard corporal punishment (several strokes of the cane) could only be administered by the Headmaster or Headmistress. If your crime warranted something more than a mild slap you were sent to the head's office, where he or she had the final say as to how stringent it might be and how it would be administered, the severity of the crime determined the severity of the punishment. I was sent for the cane on several occasions and it was always my own fault, indeed as I have implied, sometimes I actually invited it. I came up against this same phenomenon in my own children some years later. Usually it was when I was being a bloody nuisance, I probably thought I was being smart, the class comedian, but it sometimes it reached the stage where Miss Corps had to shut me up or get no class-work done. I may even have been very funny at the time, but priorities have to be considered and eventually she was forced to issue a 'Shut up or else' ultimatum. "Either sit quietly Harrison, or I will send you down for a caning!" she was force to declare. In all honesty I have to admit there were times when I accepted the dare, it was a challenge, I wanted to see how far I could push her, I wanted to force her into keeping her part of the bargain and there were times when she was pressured into doing so.

Boys being what they are, there was a ninety percent element of bravado involved, it was my way of saying I was neither scared of her, the headmaster or his bloody cane! All these elements came into play and what is important to consider now, is that I was confronting my feelings at school, not on the streets. In a different way I was dealing with my street aggression at the same time, but we'll get to that later. On being sent for my punishment, the headmaster would always talk to me before administering the finger bruising lashes and it was almost always along the line of: "Why are you here again Harrison? Why do you invite this? Miss Corps tells me that in spite of your poor marks you are a

bright, intelligent, above average boy, I don't understand you! Why do you persist in this strange behaviour?" I merely shrugged, I never answered his questions, it was my way of saying I didn't care what he or the crazy people in his adult world did to me, as far as I was concerned he and they were temporarily in my way, but only temporarily. I was determined to plough my own furrow, my only goal in life was to heed the music in my head, I was determined to become a jazz drummer in spite of them. It had long ago become abundantly clear to me that I was going to get no help from any quarter, I did try to recruit some support, but rather than receive assistance I was baulked at every turn. It really seemed to me and accurately so, that until I was in a position to organise my own future I was trapped in this mad adult world like a mouse in a treadmill, I had no choice but to accept other people's interference. I felt at the time that like it or not, I was saddled with their views and their plans for my future. "Well we'll bloody well see about that!" I thought darkly.

As for my church attendance, I went along a few times but could find nothing relevant to me in the rigmarole that occurred there and therefore having no interest in any of it, I simply stopped going. I only went to Sunday School twice in my life, it was a sort of peer group activity, all my friends went so I decided to go with them. After the lesson or whatever they call Sunday School sermons, the two young adults who were running it asked me if I would like to go to their home for tea? I asked my parents and they said yes so I arranged to go the following weekend.

I turned up as arranged but it was hopeless, they tried to woo me, but as usual I felt I had nothing in common with the age old riddles they were trying to solve and I understood even less the ancient metaphoric syntax they employed when doing so. I found it boring and totally irrelevant to my present day problems. However I did my best to be nice and decided to agree with whatever they said until I could get away from them and go about my normal business. When they looked across the table and asked me if I liked peanut butter I said "Yes." and I said this for three reasons, One, it sounded interesting, two, I had never heard of it before and three, I was trying to be nice, I didn't want to cause offence by refusing. They cut me a slice of bread, passed it to me and told me to help myself to the peanut butter. Because they had called it 'butter' I figured it looked like butter, so I took some from the butter dish and spread it on my bread, I took a bite and it tasted disappointingly like ordinary butter to me, I made no comment but munched away unimpressed. They repeatedly asked me if I really liked peanut butter and I kept repeating that I did, so they kept telling me to help myself to it. I was convinced they were mad because it tasted like common ordinary butter to me, but I ate it and lied, saying how nice it was and how much I was enjoying it. The meal seemed interminable, I was relieved when the time came for them to take me home.

I never went to Sunday School again, I figured that if church people called upon God to bless it and then ate peanut butter which tasted no different from ordinary butter, then their god was probably as crazy as they and seemingly the rest of the human race were. Many years after this incident I tasted peanut butter and then realised my mistake. I guess they must have thought me a bit odd, insisting how nice it was and how much I enjoyed the nutty flavour without ever having put any on my bread! They must have thought me completely potty or were they too thick to realise I didn't know? Either way they offered no help, they could have at least explained that I wasn't eating the damned stuff!

At this point further ignominy was heaped upon me and from a completely unexpected quarter. At the beginning of a new term and resulting from the elevation to a higher grade, it was time for the introduction to long trousers. My Mum had been resisting my clamouring for a pair of long pants for some time, basically she wanted me to remain her little boy and to some extent she got her wish, I remained little, but of course I was becoming a young man. So were my school friends, they had all long since been provided with the uniform long grey flannel trousers and I was left looking like a real

berk in silly little short ones. It is probable that my father had a word with her and convinced her that I should be brought into line with other boys of my age and finally she agreed to take me shopping to buy a pair of grey flannels. Needless to say, I was beside myself with relief. To some extent largely because of her impecunious situation she shopped at Edwin Jones, the city's largest department store, the prices were much cheaper there of course than in the bespoke tailoring shops. Unfortunately, because of her resistance to buying them in the first place when we arrived at the boy's trouser department the other mum's had got there first and there were no grey flannel pants left. I asked her to take me to a small school uniform supplier's store, a little further along East street, where I had noticed a whole shop window full of them, but she had a mind set about such places, she believed only posh children had their clothes provided by such places. "They're not for the likes of us!" she said with utter finality, "We will get you something different" Then another problem arose, when she asked to see some trousers for me, the woman behind the counter said, "We've nothing in long pants to fit him, madam. Why don't you buy the little chap a pair of short trousers, he's not really ready for long ones yet is he?" and it was not a question. Personally I wanted to run outside the shop and heave a brick through the window, but mum kept a firm grip on me. "Don't you worry son," she said, "I'll buy some material and make you some."

She was a good needle woman my old mum so I relaxed a little at her words. We made our way to the clothing material counter and guess what? The only material they didn't have was grey flannel! Undeterred she bought some black material with a silver stripe in it and made a pair of pants for me from that. I was horrified, the mere idea of facing my peers in these monstrosities was mind blowing, but she loved them, she told me that posh business men wore trousers like these in the city of London, "You should feel proud." she said. "Proud me arse!" I thought, "I'll be bloody crucified on Monday morning." and I was! Apart from the joshing I received from my friends in the playground, a few days later I overheard one of the girls in my class remark, "Why doesn't his mother buy him some proper trousers?" I could take the joking of the boys in the playground, but the smear levelled at me in the classroom was on a different plane entirely and it really stung, my skin crawled with the ignominy, I now hated my mother and my complete existence now.

The move to Sholing and the house in Luton Road meant making new friends and a joining a new peer group. I was apprehensive about it, I was still going to the Bitterne Park school and Arthur was still my best friend but I was now forced into a new environment and so had to meet and befriend a different set of boys and girls. For the most part they were pupils at nearby Itchen Grammar School and naturally, brought up in the endemic environment I'd been intimidated by; the all pervading English class system. When I caught sight of the posh school uniforms with the maroon jackets and nice grey worsted trousers I was a trifle nervous, I was aware that they too would have an opinion about my bizarre appearance. However, remarkably, these children proved to be great fun, they accepted me without fear nor favour and never once remarked on my strange garb. After a short while I relaxed completely and joined enthusiastically in all their activities. The first of these was to join their street gang, it comprised of the kids from my immediate vicinity and it was our pledge to each other that we would show the kids from other neighbourhoods just what we were made of. I didn't realise it at the time but it was a class war, I simply lived in the posh kids suburb and was therefore dragooned into their ranks. After school in the summer evenings and at weekends we would face the enemy (blue collar worker's kids, as it turned out) over the remains of brick walls and from behind the trunks of felled trees or piles of rubble on bombed sites, whereupon we would pelt each other with stones. Stones, bits of wood, lengths of gas piping, pieces of house bricks, sometimes even half a brick, there was plenty of ammunition. It was heavy artillery and dangerous, some kids ended up having stitches inserted in themselves, a blow on the

head from half a house-brick or a piece of lead pipe cannot be taken lightly you know.

We outgrew these dangerous adolescent games in time but I have always kept it lodged in the back of my mind as a reminder of the mindless violence that exists in all of us. We hated the other kids for no other reason than they lived on a street three blocks away and in this particular instance their fathers worked in a factory. Well my dad worked in a factory too as it happens, but somehow I had slipped through the net. It made no sense then and makes no sense now, it merely indicates that it is primeval, it's programmed into us, we are subject to territorial boundaries and instinctively protect them, even if nobody is actively threatening them, it is the fundamental basis of prejudice in all its shapes and colours. I have pointed out previously that the greater problem lies in the fact that as adults we continue to play these games but with real bombs and bullets. There is always a leader, he will always don military garb and he invariably tells us that the other chaps are bad and we have to get them before they get us. We are ever willing to believe him and we follow his every command, we enjoy the excitement his battles generate, even the trips to hospital are later boasted about and we create heroes from our own ranks and pile them with praise. The other side's heroes are invariably regarded as criminals. As I look around me at the state of things around the world today it only convinces me further that the human race does not ever entirely grow up.

To the feminists reading these words, scoffing at these hateful childish practices in the mistaken belief that they are the sole domain of boys and therefore laying the evils of this world squarely upon male shoulders, I have to disappoint you. I must point out that then, as now, the neighbourhood girls were equally engaged in these battles and were equally excited by them. They stood beside us and hurled the missiles with us, those who were unable to throw well, collected stones and laid them at the feet of the best boy throwers and think about that for a few moments! They urged us on, shouted encouragement, applauded our successes and dressed our wounds. It worked, We were proudly showing off our young muscles to them, they in turn responded by nursing those of us who were hurt. They were every bit as exhilarated by the excitement as we were.

Another interesting point was that one of our number, Michael, had a foot in both camps, if you can forgive another pun. I don't mean to imply that like myself, he was a plebeian consorting with patricians and waging war on his own kind. Michael was different, to all intents and purposes he was a little boy, or that is to say, superficially he was a boy, but there the similarity ended, Michael was really a little girl in a boy's body.

We did not spend our entire time throwing stones at the other children, we played all the usual games, rugby, soccer, cricket, any game that involved throwing and catching a ball and as usual the boys took part in playground games involving hard tackling and shoulder charging. These game included a very rough version of reverse tag, instead of one boy chasing all the others trying to touch one and thus pass the buck, in this game a single boy had to get from one end of the playground to the other unscathed, while all the others tried to stop him. To a large extent it was much like playing Rugger, but without a ball. There was also a game in which a boy leaned against a wall and all the others ran and piled on top of him until finally the heap collapsed. Personally I never understood the rules of that one. I suppose the object was to see how many could pile on before the inevitable collapse occurred. Another was a version of hide and seek in which, when the hider was discovered, all the seekers jumped into his hiding place, piling on top of him thus creating a large writhing bundle of tangled arms and legs, It had much the same effect as the previous game in fact, we were simply doing the things that boys get up to during the course of their day. However Michael was no good at any of them, he preferred playing with girls, more to the point he preferred playing with their dolls. He smiled the way girls did, he walked, ran and talked the way they did, he used eye language the way they did, everything about him was

female, except his actual shape.

I noticed with great interest that he was never bullied, nobody called him names or intimidated him in any way whatsoever. I found this odd, In my previous experience and more usual stratum of society he would have been pilloried mercilessly. I was very curious about this but as a newcomer to the area I figured it wiser not to comment on it. He was included in all their street games but only if he wanted to play, he was inept at most of them however and therefore he was never included in the needle matches. These were properly organised soccer and cricket matches played against other organised teams in the area and although Michael went along to these matches to cheer our team on, he never actually played in the fielded team. Curious though I was I decided the safest policy was to maintain a low profile on the subject and say nothing, he was one of them you see. No, that is not a pun, nor am I being facetious, he really was one of them, he was of them, born and raised among them, he had grown up with them and they had never known him to be any other way, they accepted him for what he was and for what he had always been, it never occurred to them that Michael should be any other way.

During our street fights, or more accurately the stone throwing contests, he was enthusiastic but ineffectual, he threw the stones incredibly gracefully, arms wafting like a ballet dancer. Unfortunately the stones landed a mere fifteen feet in front of him, his heart was in the right place, at least he tried, considering the enemy was at least six to seven times that distance away, his efforts fell on stony ground so to speak. At no time while I was living there, did anyone ever remark upon this young person's personality. As a newcomer to the area, being tiny and obliged to deal with bullies from time to time, I decided against drawing attention to myself by even mentioning it, I knew only too well how difficult it was to be regarded as different, this much I shared with him. It was a fundamental lesson though, none of us, that is to say neither he nor we understood at that stage, that there was any real difference between girls and boys. Oh we were aware of the superficial differences of course, there were the obvious differences, Longer hair, frilly dresses, that sort of thing, I knew about that, I could see them with my own eyes, but we were not cognisant as to the whys or wherefores. I knew he was not putting on an act, he was simply a little girl in the wrong shaped body, it wasn't a choice he had to make, it was how he was, period. I thought no more about it.

Recently I had the pleasure of recording Trevor Rippingale's band 'The New Wolverines' in my little private recording studio and during a break for their usual cup of Milo and a wine gum, the musicians began talking about their recent hectic tour of the Australian Bush towns. Banjo player Stew Binstead laughed and said, "I still haven't got over that pub we stopped at for a drink one afternoon!" I raised my eyebrows and looked at him, my eyes demanding an explanation. "Well," he began, "we were way out in the bush, I mean the proper bush, the real outback, redneck territory, full of real bushies, you know the type, greasy Akubra hats, dirty singlets, grubby shorts, a four day stubble, a beer gut hanging over their belt buckles and enormous muddy boots with the laces undone. Schooners of Fourex were going down without touching the sides! Know wot I mean?" I nodded, I knew exactly what he meant. Been there done that, in fact the last time I was in one of those places, I ordered a beer and then went to the toilet. as I approached the door a huge gorilla barred my way. "Women and poofers through there mate!" he snarled, nodding in the direction of the Ladies Loo. Abandoning all thoughts of having the piss (or drinking my beer) I left the building. There's no sense in being brave at a time like that. In the fine old W.C. Fields' tradition, my thought was, "If at first you don't succeed, give up, m'boy! No sense in making a fool of yerself!" But I digress, back to Stewie's story. "Well," he continued, "serving behind the bar was this outrageous queen. Honestly, I couldn't believe me eyes! I mean really outrageous, over the top. You know, eye make up, mascara, lippie, Cheek blush, silk blouse, hair lacquer, the full Monty! He was scampering about like they do, his bejewelled hands wafting about like

a ballet dancer's, "Same again dear!" he said the moment anyone's glass was empty. The bushies, who would call you a poofter if you walked into the place wearing a clean shirt, were completely unconcerned, it was as if they hadn't noticed! It was weird, if I hadn't been there meself I would never have believed it possible!" Over many years I have had cause to observe the way so called *normal* society treats such people and as I listened to Stewie's story I couldn't help thinking of Michael and his friends in Sholing.

However I'm digressing, back to the main story. Michael and my new friends aside, music was still driving me insane, so far I had failed to make any progress towards achieving my ambition and deep inside I was immobilised, frozen with frustration. However when we moved to the house in Luton road I found a temporary diversion, two houses along on the opposite side of the road lived a speedway rider by the name of Bert Croucher. When the war had ended and petrol again became available motor racing of all kinds had started up again and at thirteen years of age one is impressionable. To have a real live speedway rider as a close neighbour was very exciting and I was impressed. There was a lot to be impressed about, I constantly read of his appearances both at the speedway stadium and the local grass track events, I had seen photographs of him in the Southern Daily Echo, so I found it hard to believe that living right here in my very own street was a famous racing motorcyclist. He owned a beautiful SS Jaguar car with a trailer hitched behind it, mounted upon which were two shiny chromium plated J.A.P. racing machines.

I fell in love with them, I desperately wanted one of my own and at every opportunity I crossed the road to stand and gawk at them. My imagination was running riot, I became Bert Croucher! I aped his walk and dreamed of being like him, I was in awe of him, if I was standing near his machines when he came out of his house, either to work on them, or to get into his car and drive to a race meeting, my mind became immobilised with embarrassment and I quickly walked away. In all the time I lived near him I never plucked up the courage to speak to him. I did however develop an avid interest in motor cycles, every boy does at some stage and I was no exception. Fortunately in this case it gave me something else to dream about.

Two houses away from him, in the house exactly opposite ours, lived quite a large family. There were three children, two of whom were a lot older than I, but the youngest, a ginger haired boy named David was my own age and of course we became mates. He elected to become my guide and showed me the places of interest in the area. Sholing was a fringe suburb on the far eastern edge of the great seaport, drive past Sholing and you were into the rural area between Southampton and Portsmouth. To the South East lay Bursledon, Hamble and Fareham, or if you were travelling north East for twenty five miles you would arrive at my old stamping ground, West Meon, so we were literally on the border of the urban and rural areas. David led me to his favourite playground, a large wood, or a small forest, if you prefer, and what a splendid playground it was, he was a nature lover was David, or an interested observer I should say and I couldn't have chosen a better partner or guide. I cannot now tell you how big it was in acres or square yards, but it occupied the area now covered by the Thornhill Housing estate. It was certainly large enough for us to get lost, deep among it's dense undergrowth.

A natural uncultivated forest area, it contained trees of every kind, including elms, before the disease took it's toll. There were many vast oaks, the largest of which became our lookout post. Climbing to it's topmost branches we had a clear view of the surrounding countryside, it was possible to see the town of Southampton in one direction and the spires of Portsmouth in the other.

We roamed these woods constantly, following well beaten tracks, but we also moved through the dense undergrowth, making camp among the tangled ocean of ferns and briar's that covered the forest floor. We knew where all the nut bearing trees were and fed ourselves on a diet of pine, hazel and beech nuts

whenever they were in season. The best though by far, were the chestnut trees. In their season we would search around in the brush to find short lengths of fallen branches which we then threw into the trees to dislodge the beautiful nuts, their husks looking like bright green sea urchins. Having brought them to earth, we risked painfully pricking our fingers opening them to remove the shiny mahogany kernels. Sometimes we built a fire and roasted them, after which Dave urged me to help properly extinguish the embers before leaving to go home. The nuts we couldn't eat we stuffed down the front of our woolly pullover's and walked through the streets looking like two pot bellied elves. That evening Mum Dad and I sat by the open fire and roasted them on the hob.

Not far from the foot of our lookout tree was a spring, not a big one, not in the sense of being the birthplace of some great river, it was in fact just the beginning of a small stream and was always wet green and very succulent. During and after a heavy rainfall it became a gusher, the water bubbling up from the depths of the beautiful mossy hole in the manner we imagined all great springs must do as they spawn the Nile, the Thames, the Amazon and the other great waterways of the world. It was our own special private spring, sometimes we would sit by it for hours, eating nuts and just enjoying being there. Wild life abounded, nothing exotic mind you but fascinating to young boys of course. There were rabbits, moles, voles, squirrels and a fox or two. We believed there was a badger's lair somewhere too but we never saw hide nor hair of one. Hope forever springs eternal in youthful bosoms so we were always on the lookout for unusual spores or tracks. We went bird-nesting, but only to look, we never damaged any of the nests we found nor removed any of the eggs. We were dismayed when we found a nests torn to pieces the eggs splattered around the base of the trees and we chased any boys away whom we suspected of or caught vandalising the nests. Sometimes we played boyhood games, the woods becoming Sherwood Forest as we became Robin Hood and his Merry Man. We played Cowboys and Indians of course or acted out the fantasy world characters recently gleaned from the new American comics which were emerging at the time, probably introduced by the GI's.

One afternoon while playing in the more dense part of the undergrowth, suddenly the ferns parted and we were confronted by a girl. Slightly older than we were, she stood before us holding herself arrogantly erect, almost leaning backwards in a hand on hips pose. We ceased our game and looked up at her.

"Well well well!" she said, "Batman and Robin is it, or are we Billy the Kid and Wild Bill Hickock today?" "We were just playing games," I said, "do you want to play with us?" She smiled, "I know a game that's better than the games you play!" she said. Her smile was not the usual smile, it wasn't a happy smile or even friendly, it lurked faintly around the corners of her mouth and dwelt deeply within in her eyes and it was her eyes which now held me, fascinated. They smouldered, this was a smile I had certainly never encountered before. I knew where it was leading though, I had played this game before although admittedly I had never before encountered such blazing orbs in any of my previous liaisons with little girls. This was no little girl however, this was a young woman of around fourteen years of age and I was seeing lust personified for the first time. "I play a game with a man," she confided, "and he let's me play with his dick and all this yellow stuff comes out of it!"

At this point figured she must be lying, because although I was no expert on grown men, I knew that semen was not yellow but a sort of milky white colour. However I was intrigued and excited by this turn of events and decided that now was not a good time to argue the point. "Well, do you want to play or not?" she asked. "Sure!" we replied and down came our pants and in seconds we stood revealed to her. Dropping her knickers she stepped out of them, unbuttoned her dress all the way down and opened it wide. She was naked, a fully formed young woman and lovely to look at I might add. My eyes came out like organ-stops and my brain cells lit up, inside of my head was like a Christmas tree. Supremely

aware of the effect she was having, her arrogance deepened and opening her legs she posed even more aggressively. We were thunderstruck, it was quite beyond anything I could have conjured up on my own, even in the most erotic of my dreams! Standing there, her legs apart, holding herself in a slightly backward leaning pose, it was as if without moving a muscle she was thrusting her body at us. We stood, our mouths open, gazing in awe at the wondrous sight. I was unprepared for anything like this, it was quite beyond my expectations. For a start it was my first glimpse of a pair of breasts that did not resemble my own! Oh I was aware of the different shape of older girls at school and I was eaten with natural curiosity to know what the intriguing swellings under their gym-slips really looked like. I had even seen forbidden pictures of them in what was considered back then a very naughty magazine, the 'Health And Efficiency Magazine', but the photographs were black and white with the nipples and pubic hair air-brushed out, so they gave no true picture of the real thing. Confronted with it now we were immobilised. We gazed at her, bending slightly to get a better view of the revealed secrets. Neither made any attempt to touch, we were too gobsmacked to do anything but gaze. She looked down at us for a while, for how long I can't say, then suddenly her smile vanished, stepping into her pants she pulled them up and wrapping her dress around her she melted back into the undergrowth.

David and I looked at each other without a word, I pulled my pants up and he did the same, still without speaking. I suppose we were lost in our assessment of what had just occurred. I don't recall us saying anything, other than, "Bloody hell mush!" We began walking home without being aware of which direction we were taking, nor caring very much for that matter. Curiously I don't remember ever raising the subject with him again, I suppose we kept our private longings to ourselves.

She lived only a few houses from me and I saw her often, either going to or coming from her school, sometimes she was simply with her parents on the front lawn of their home. She never spoke to me nor approached me again, though I dearly wanted her to very much, she merely smiled and nodded a silent hello but it was never the kind of smile that had immobilised me on that memorable afternoon in the woods. From that moment onward no matter what happened to me, my life was changed forever, now I had something in my head that seriously rivalled my lust for a drum-kit. However, Our lack of action had obviously disappointed her, I felt embarrassed and wanted her to give me another chance, but of course there would never be another chance, an opportunity missed in this particular sphere is alas an opportunity gone forever. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned is nothing compared to the disinterest of a woman who scorns. We can never win them back, only very rarely are there exceptions to this and they come at a great cost, as I was to discover many years hence. As you read this account now, it probably seems like something inspired by D.H. Lawrence from 'The Greenwood And The Nymph.' but it happened just as I've described. I don't even need to gild the lily and if the lady in question, a grandmother by now I've no doubt, ever reads this, she will remember it occurred just exactly as I have described here. Curiouser and curiouser however, is my memory of her, like the smile on the Cheshire Cat, which you will recall remains, when all other parts have faded from view, the most memorable part of this beautiful young girl, the parts which remained crystalised and gleaming bright in my mind throughout the years, were her eyes. For a few moments they stopped the music.

The interruption was only a momentary one though, by now the music inside my head had become a permanent companion, the feeling that it was keeping me awake at night had increased and by this time I think it probably was, each night for sure when I went to bed I was kept awake by the sound of my own orchestra, complete with string section and it was getting louder and louder and more insistent. Nothing could stop it, unfortunately only I could hear it.

Meanwhile back at the coalface, everyday life was crashing all around me and I could do nothing to stop that either. I refused to continue with the silly walks, I was still very tiny and still had flat feet,

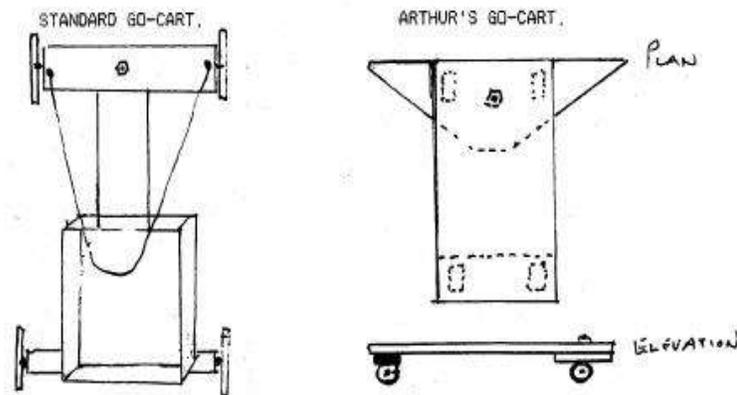
despite the doctor's efforts, (well now there's a surprise!) but I was now attending the Ear Nose and Throat Clinic at The Royal South Hants Hospital, this time for the treatment of recurring headaches. In hindsight I'm sure it was psychological tension caused by all this crazy adult nonsense but there was no point in arguing with them. It was hardly surprisingly though, my mum was constantly worried about anything connected with head pain, automatically she linked it with the ears and the possible loss of hearing. Therefore once a week I was carted off to the hospital where, upon arrival, my ears were syringed. Then a red rubber tube was introduced into my sinuses through my nostrils, on the other end of this tube was a rubber ball, like that on a sphygmomanometer, which the doctor repeatedly squeezed, pumping air into my head, a strange and uncomfortable experience to say the least. After the passage of so many years, I cannot recall the precise bone of their contention nor the hostile words involved, but my mother and the ENT Doctor argued bitterly every single week. It was largely because he was arrogantly rude to her and she was not a respecter of persons my mum, she was unable to handle such behaviour. "How dare you speak to me in that manner? who the hell are you!" she would thunder. I inherited that trait and I am grateful for it.

At school the madness continued, I was still imbibing two pints of milk plus four dessert spoonfuls of cod liver oil and malt per day. "Now come along young Harrison, this will make you grow into a big boy!" the teachers still averred. Even after all these years not a single one of them had noticed that it wasn't working. "And why big?" I repeatedly asked myself, "What is so special about big?" On looking about me I saw scant evidence to indicate that the further from the ground the human brain was suspended the more intelligent it became, on the contrary, bullies were as thick as shit and they were invariably big! But at least I'd learned how to deal with them, they had ceased to be a problem. There was still the problem of my being left handed though, it was not a problem for me but it was certainly a problem for adults, I was continually forced to write with my right hand and rapped over the knuckles with a ruler if I used my normal hand, well it felt normal to me, all of me felt normal to me, it wasn't me who was having problems with me!

I assessed my situation, frankly things could have been worse I supposed, my true feelings on these weighty matters were very simple, as bad as things might seem on the surface, at least I had beaten the bullies and survived the bombing, I had made it through the war. A war of someone else's making, adults of course but I was still alive! On the downside however, I had been forbidden to visit or play with my cousins or to talk to any of my aunties or uncles. In point of fact, unlike other children, I was completely cut off from my larger family. I made a quick mental summation of these motley insanities, covering the years I had so far spent on this mad planet, The war apart I had been turned away from school for being thought under age, which turned out to be undersized according to some strange unfathomable law. I had been misled into believing one and six was eighteen pence etcetera then struck viciously in the face for not understanding figures. I had been made to walk on my toes and the sides of my feet because they were flat, whatever flat feet were? they looked fine from above and worked very well. Currently I was being subjected to having air puffed into my head through tubes which were shoved up my nose, I was being rapped over the knuckles by my teachers for using the 'wrong' hand, while being made to drink gallons of milk and eat copious amounts of gooey brown crap specifically administered in order to alter my shape and size, though personally I could detect nothing whatever wrong with it in the first place. I had come the full circle it seemed! All These things, forced upon me by others, merely served to crystallise my view that basically, the human race is a bunch of loonies and as far as I was concerned, left a great deal to be desired, in every aspect! A view which I still hold to this very day - and the dafter they behave, the more convinced I become!

Albeit, putting certain peculiarities aside and ignoring the loony majority, life at school was still great,

Arthur had found a new way to get our adrenalin pumping and it was solely his own brain child.



Standard SBD go-cart.

Arther's innovative new design

The kids living around us all had go-carts, Soap-Box Derby go-carts I mean, SBD's. Consisting of a set of pram wheels, two planks of wood, a short piece of '3 by 2' timber, a length of rope and a wooden soap box (begged from the local grocery store), the boys built the vehicles themselves, secretly assisted by their fathers of course. The planks were joined together using a large nut-and-bolt, forming the letter T, the 3 by 2 was nailed on the rear end and a wheel attached to each corner, the box was fixed in position over the rear axle, the rope attached to the cross spar (as reins) and you were ready for the road! A case of: 'All I need, is a wooden steed, and a spar to steer her by.'

as the then Poet Laureate might have put it. *Who was the poet laureate of the day by the way? (Well go on then, go and look it up!)

The owner of the SBD cart sat in the box holding the reins, while his bosom pal pushed him along. Of course if his pal possessed the right amount of cunning he got to change places with the owner from time to time, (or he wouldn't push him, right?) However the best fun to be had was to find the steepest hill in the neighbourhood and launch yourselves recklessly onto it together!

None of this was exciting enough for Arthur Cove! He designed and built what was really the fore-runner of today's skateboard although we didn't know that at the time and it certainly looked nothing like one, nor so far as I know was it an influence on the present day device. Much shorter than the Soap-Box-Derby model, it had had no box fixed to it. Still Tee-shaped however, the cross piece used to steer it by was 'V' shaped and on the underside Arthur had fixed four roller-skate wheels, tiny compared with the baby-carriage wheels used on other boy's soap-box trolleys and instead of sitting in it, Arthur lay face down and steered it with his hands. A spartan vehicle compared to a normal go-cart, it gave us a far more thrilling ride (and for the benefit of the lazy gits who couldn't be bothered to go and research it the then Poet Laureate was John Masefield).

'*Tres Formidable*' is the only way to describe it and it was portable too, we could even carry it with us on the bike. Naturally we took it to the steepest hills around. The steepest, but also the shortest, was Athelston Hill, which rated a resounding, "Aaaaaaargh!" Next was the longer slope of Big-Lances Hill, it was good but rated only an "Aaaaaargh." Then there was Little-Lances Hill. Now that was a hill! Shorter and steeper than Big-Lances Hill, it had the added danger of converging with its larger

neighbour at their bottoms and therefore rated at least an Aaaaaaaaaaargh!

However our all time favourite was Middenbury Hill (an interesting name now I think about it, because judging by the length and steepness of the hill, it must have begun life as the largest midden in the world). In addition to being steep, it was a long and had a dangerous curve half-way down, so it rated a very serious, full blown “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

At first Arthur and I began by 'taking turns', he rode it down a hill, carried it back to the top and handed it to me, I did likewise and we did that until hitting on the brilliant idea of me lying on top of him and both of us racing down the hill together. On Middenbury Hill we were forced to lean into the curve at an angle of forty five degrees, to avoid being flung off! “Christ,” I exclaimed one day, “ if my mum ever catches the slightest inkling of what I am doing here I'll be locked in my room and my food 'll be pushed under the door!” Arthur, giggled, “Could a boy of your age survive on Melba toast?” he wondered.

In tandem with this invention, (d' you like that? 'in tandem with'. Not bad eh!) Arthur designed a model speed-boat and it too differed remarkably from model boats available in model-shops.

I should point out here, that soon after the cessation of hostilities, tiny E.D. model diesel engines had appeared on the market and model aircraft were what young men were fitting them into. Mostly their models were scaled down replicas of wartime-planes, coming from either side, aircraft modellers were quite unbiased, Spitfires, Heinkels, Hurricanes, Lysanders, Messerschmidts, they didn't care. The Tiger Moth was my favourite though and still is! If I have secret longing for a joy unfulfilled it is to go up for a joy-ride in a real Tiger Moth. But, here I go, digressing again.

After the war, every piece of grassland had a guy walking around in circles attached to a model aeroplane by two lengths of fishing line. (this was before radio control was even dreamed of) For the more genteel model makers there were the sedate electrically powered replicas of ocean liners. the 'Queen Mary' and 'Queen Elizabeth' being foremost, of course with the popular and sadly missed Isle Of Wight paddle steamer, the 'Gracie Fields' coming a close third. Incidentally, the original paddle-steamer had been sunk by a German bomb, which immediately increased public interest in her of course. However I was one of the luckier ones, just before the war broke out my parents and their neighbours, the Kehoes, took us myself and their children, Jacky and Kathleen on a trip to the Isle Of Wight and we actually made the trip on the the 'Gracie Fields'.

On the following page is a photograph of myself and the Kehoe kids posing for the my dad and his new Kodak Box-Brownie (also a souvenir of his New-York trips). We as you can see we are pictured at a drinking-fountain somewhere in the hinterland of the island. Alas, I have no photographs of the 'Gracie Fields'.



Kenny Harrison and Jacky & Kathie Kehoe on the Issel of Widjit.

But to return to my story:

Last, but by no means least, there were model sailing yachts, on any fine summer evening plus weekends, these exquisite little craft could be seen ploughing across the ornamental lakes of Southampton Common. However, this was all too tame for Arthur, he'd studied these pursuits and figured, "If we could put one of those little aircraft engines in a boat, mush, we'd have one helluva boat. Right?" and right he was! His design was like nothing I had ever seen before, a shallow draft flat bottomed, blunt nosed skiff with a step in it's keel, if indeed a flat bottomed boat can be said to possess a keel, it was extremely utility in design. the cockpit, in full view.

The hull was two feet long from stem to stern and ten inches wide at it's broadest beam, there was no superstructure of any kind, just an engine mounted inside the hull. When the construction was completed and the boat stained and varnished, we proudly carried it to the great lakes on Southampton Common for its launching and maiden-voyage.

Southampton Common was (and indeed I hope, still is) a large recreation area which in fact boasts several lakes, well three to be precise. A large circular cement-pond, big but very ordinary, nothing fancy, close by was another, larger cement pond, or to be more precise, it was an ornamental lake with flagstone walkways connecting the shore to a central-island and fountain. Mind you the water in this confection was but a few inches deep so if you removed your shoes and rolled up your trousers, you could wade to the island. Finally there was a lake *aux-naturel*. Okay, it wasn't really *aux-naturel* but designed to appear that way and it was impressive too, there was even a small island at one end with several large trees growing on it.

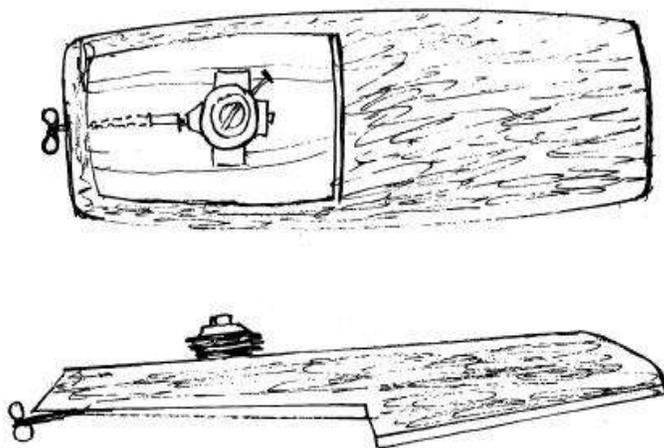
After a cursory inspection, we chose the natural lake for the launching ceremony, because the cement pools posed an obvious danger for the little boat, namely, cement! As yet untried, we'd no real idea how the fast the boat would travel and neither of us were stupid, we knew it was going to move a hell of a

lot faster than the 'Gracie Fields' or the 'Queens Mary and Elizabeth', who ploughed sedately and even majestically across the water.

So, after a very brief consideration we both agreed to give cement a wide berth. At the lake's edge, I held the craft while Arthur primed and started the engine, then he taking it from me, he said, "You'd better start walking around to the other side, to catch it when it gets there." I agreed and set off.

I was maybe halfway there when he put the boat in the water and almost simultaneously yelled, **"Bloody hell Ken! Run for Christ's sake!"** and I ran. I ran as fast as I could and so did Arthur in the opposite direction, but it would have taken a fleetier creature than mere homo-sapiens to skirt the lake in time to save the little boat. Before we were anywhere near its final destination it had ripped across the surface and buried its nose in the opposite bank, its propeller shaft snapped and the entire structure in need of some instant TLC (not to mention re-glueing).

The mixture of emotions Arthur and I shared at that moment hovered between surprise, pride and incredulity mixed with horror at the extent of the damage. "Bloody hell, mush!" breathed Arthur as we stared the shattered remains. "Well, we know it works!" I added, pithily, "Yeah!" he replied ruefully. Picking it up as though it was a beloved pet that had just been run over by a car, he muttered "Well, it's back to the workshop for some repairs." and clambering on his bike, with me cradling the remains of the world's fastest 'Instant wreckage' in my arms, we pedalled for home.



My impression of Arthur's Cove's model Speed-boat.

We repaired it of course and had lots of fun with it, but it didn't last long. It was grossly overpowered and in time shook itself to pieces. The fuel melted the varnish and dissolved the glue which helped accelerate its self-destruction. However, for a few months we were the *enfant terribles* of the Southampton Common model-boating fraternity. Other owners, who used the lake, on seeing us arrive would curse roundly and remove their own boats from the water, for safety sake. They stayed to watch ours though and were even joined by some of the model aircraft devotees who, while not actually into boats, were impressed by our monster.

We never made the same mistake again though, from then on I was stationed somewhere near where we thought it might end up, Arthur would then release it, I would catch it, turn it round and send it back where it came from.

Meanwhile, at school we were up to our usual tricks, over a period of time we had formed ourselves into a quartet, that is to say we had joined forces with two other boys, John Abrams and Raymond

Reynolds who now sat immediately behind us and had become part of the comedy act. We had by this time been promoted to a higher grade, but, either by a quirk of fate or plain good management on the part of the staff allocation committee, Miss Corps was still in charge of us. Apart from knowing how to handle us, she was also our straight man, she, poor soul was the solitary Bud Abbott to our four Lou Costellos.

I should have mentioned before this that it was a co-educational school, thank heavens! The classes were arranged somewhere about sixteen a side and divided down the middle, girls on the left, boys on the right.(unless you were the teacher, then it was vice versa of course) and never the twain shall meet. Indeed on one memorable occasion as a punishment Miss Corpes sent me to sit next to a girl, an ignominious thing to happen to a boy of my age.

As soon as I sat down I figured reverse strategy would be the quickest way out of this state of affairs. I whispered to the girl what my plan was and she agreed, giggling at the very idea. I put one arm around her waist and the other hand up her skirt and was back in my own seat in a nano-second. My feet never touched the floor!

The sports master at BPSM was one Wally Previtt. He had a game leg and walked with a pronounced limp. In spite of his impediment he was a great sports master, fantastic even, a genius no less! Not only did he succeed in taking both the Bitterne Park Secondary Modern Soccer and Cricket teams to the top of the National School League, he also led both the All England Boy's squads to the same dizzy heights in the European Boys Cup.

Without a shadow of doubt Wally Previtt was *the* major school sports coach of his time, indeed of any time, but as with all of us he had an Achilles-heel (and that wasn't why he limped). Wally hated girls, absolutely abhorred them, had no patience with them whatever. Whenever he was rostered to take over from Miss Corps, the female half of our class became petrified with fear. From the moment she announced Mr Previtt would be taking over for the afternoon, the females came to pieces. And they had just cause, he was a bloody monster! From the outset he snapped and snarled at them and was unspeakably rude, always for no accountable reason. From the moment he walked into the room he changed into an entirely different person from the Wally Previtt we knew when in charge of a class of boys.

Well the girls may have been scared, but we weren't happy about it either, whatever the reason may have been that produced his vitriolic alter ego, a snappy snarling teacher is a snappy snarling teacher, right? So the boys were getting a backlash, as long as there were girls present Wally Prevatt snarled at us too.

In extremis we (the gang of four) formed a protection committee, whenever his temper showed signs of getting out of control one of us, either Arthur, John or Ray would stage whisper, "I reckon Len Hutton was LBW on that second ball of the fifth over on Saturday, that bloody umpire must have been blind!" Wally's face would turn puce, "Rubbish!" he'd thunder, "it was a no-ball! Besides, it snicked his bat!" "Oh I don't think so sir," I'd say, throwing my cap into the ring, "from where I was standing it didn't look that way to me!" Wally's eyebrows would shoot skywards, "You, Harrison? What would you know about it? You fall asleep after the first ball!"

He was correct, I was not remotely interested in sport and he knew it. I'd never watched a game of cricket in my life, but this staged diversion was not about cricket, it was about getting girls off the hook and him on it. And it never failed, once the subject of sport had been raised, Wally never looked back. Be it maths, history, geography, it didn't matter what the lesson was, for the rest of the period girls would be forgotten and he would argue the merits of whichever game was currently in the spotlight. The girls relaxed visibly and as long as they kept a low profile and out of the discussion, they were safe.

I was never safe though! I was definitely not on Wally Previtt's list of favourite pupils, I was guilty of the greatest crime of all, greater even than that of being a girl, I was a boy who was not interested in sport! "It's not natural! What on earth's the matter with you Harrison?" he'd thunder. Such a child was totally beyond his comprehension.

Apart from my lack of interest, I was too small to be effective in most of them. In spite of my urgent protestations, I was once forced to run in the quarter-mile event at the school sports afternoon. Half the length of the course behind the rest of the field, I remorselessly insisted on finishing the race and it took me so long they started the runners for the next race before I'd actually crossed the line. They never made the mistake again. Actually I could run quite fast but wanted it to remain my secret, a card kept close to my chest. The high jump was out of the question and my long jump was not impressive either although some years later a very beautiful girl-friend once commented that I'd become very good at it. On the soccer field, being left footed I ran about on the left wing looking alert and generally managed to keep out of harm's way, but it was on the cricket field that Wally Previtt and I really clashed. You see, I was a left-handed bowler but a right-handed batsman. That was more than Wally could tolerate, as far as he was concerned it was inconsistent and that was unforgivable, but not as unforgivable as not being interested. He knew that spiritually I was elsewhere and anyone not interested in sport was beyond the pale, it angered him and it showed. It never pays to be different!

I wasn't a bad bowler as it happens, not grade 'A' but a useful stand by, I gave a few batsmen a nasty moment or two from time to time. However as a batsman it was harder to assess my true worth because I was always out so quickly we never had time to find out! Personally I was relieved to be out, the mere idea of standing in front of three sticks while some madman hurled a rock hard ball at me at speeds close to a hundred miles an hour was low on a list of things I wanted to do. However, as relieved as I may have been, I always made a strategic point of looking aggrieved on being given out and mumbled angrily to myself as I trudged off the field... The real trouble began when I was put out to field, after a few minutes I would be grooving along with the big-band in my head. Which, except for when I was asleep, I could actually control and by that I mean I could direct it, make it play how I wanted, I was the composer, conductor and the drummer, if you follow me. At such times I would stand deep in the outfield having a great time, I didn't care about cricket, I was playing the drums. The ball would trickle past me and I would suddenly become aware of Wally Previtt's demented screams getting louder and louder. "Harrison, Harrison, Harrison, HARRISON, HARRISON! WAKE UP BOY! **WHAT THE BLAZES IS THE MATTER WITH YOU?**" and feeling slightly embarrassed I'd pick up the ball and return it to the wicket keeper. Five minutes later halfway through a splendid big band version of, 'When I Take My Sugar To Tea' I would receive the ball full in the pit of my stomach, when I recovered I would look up to find Wally glaring down at me. "That's what you get for not paying attention!" he'd bellow. I never improved and as far as he was concerned I was a lost cause, a freak! "Boys love sport!" he snarled, "Why can't you be normal, like everybody else!" "NORMAL?" I thought, outraged, "What would you know about normal? What's normal about a sports coach who is a cripple and hates girls? Holy shit Previtt, and you think I'm abnormal!?" I'd mutter angrily.

He was a man for all seasons though, it didn't matter what time of the year it was, he was into it. In winter time when Wally walked in the room all you had to say was, "What do think of the Saints' chances in the FA cup then sir?" and he'd be away with the fairies. No sport was too obscure for Wally, he was a walking sporting encyclopaedia. If there was no fixtures of any real interest on that week, I would fall back on asking him questions like, "Why do they use the word 'love' instead of 'Nil' in tennis sir? That alone was guaranteed to get him off the subject of maths and snarling at girls for at least fifteen minutes. He died while young and I was truly sorry to hear of his passing. Wally Prevatt was a

great loss to school sporting activities in the UK, and indeed probably all over Europe.

It was near end of term, we had to learn a poem, I can't recall the name of the poet, but it was his dedication to William Shakespeare and contained the line: 'But not the light behind the brow.' The arts in general presented no mysteries to me and exacted no great effort, I learned such things very quickly, poetry, music, drawing, painting. Indeed even my essays, apart from the bent syntax, hilarious spelling and untenable grammar, were at least adventurous and I hoped, fun. In all truth even today if someone hadn't invented the computer with its full-screen viewing, Cut and Paste facility and the correction and spell-checker, this book might never have seen the light of day, but again I digress, back to the poem. Outside the classroom, in my inimitable style and with the contempt of one swimming in his own waters, I took to altering the words to amuse my friends. When reciting the poem I adopted a theatrical Shakespearian voice and sonorously declared: 'But not the shite behind the cow!' My performance went down very well, especially with the girls who giggled uncontrollably to my everlasting satisfaction.

On the day of the exams, as usual I wrote my name at the top of the maths paper and put down my pen. "Don't worry, son, we'll make up for it in other subjects." I comforted myself. Eventually we came to the poetry section and when I was asked to take my turn, I sailed confidently through the piece with the assurance of one who knows he's on his own ground.

Alas I'd formed a habit and at the end of my soliloquy, I sat down to a silence you couldn't have hacked your way through with a chainsaw. Opening her desk, Miss Corps took a large and very heavy book from inside, 'The Fisherman's Handbook. Volume One' it was called and she banged me on the head with it. "Most amusing Harrison," she said, "eight out of ten!" She docked me a mark for each wrong word and I'd gained a severe headache for my unconscious crudity. I was dumbfounded, I looked around at my colleagues, male and female, a question mark furrowing my pained features. They were grinning at me nodding admiringly with their thumbs up. "Good one, mush!" they were signalling. I rubbed my sore head, "Oh no! I didn't, did I?" I thought, "I can't believe I said that!" Nevertheless I stood up and took my applause like a pro.

During the morning break, I excused myself and wandered off on my own. "So that's what she meant by being 'within book range'." I mused morosely, "Well bugger that, I'll fix her little game!" and sneaking into the classroom, I removed the book from her desk, hid it in the stationary cupboard and evaporated swiftly back into the playground, rejoining my friends.

After play-time was over, I walked nonchalantly into the class and sat down at my desk. Miss Corps opened her desk, removed, 'The Fisherman's Handbook, Volume II' and belted me over the head with it. Another round to Miss Corps, 'Game Set and Match', I think.

Somewhere around this time my mother began developing the first symptoms of what was to become chronic agoraphobia, she began finding excuses to stay home, true, my dad had always done his share of the weekly shopping, indeed he shared all of the household chores, for instance he always cooked the week-end meals, the Sunday roast being his speciality. I can honestly say that my father's Yorkshire Pudding was something I have never been able to match, nor, come to that, have I ever reached the utter perfection of his crisp crunchy pork crackling, performed on the dismembered leg of a pig. Be that as it may, as I was saying among other things he also did much of the weekly shopping.

As her condition worsened, Mum gradually increased her requests for his shopping list to include the things she normally went out for herself, gradually, almost imperceptibly, day by day he was doing all the shopping, until finally he took to combining the whole operation in one fell swoop.

From then on, every Saturday morning he would catch the bus downtown and spend a couple of hours

wandering around the stores. On the way home he'd call in at a pub, have a few beers and eventually would arrive home at one o'clock, just in time for lunch.

It was a rather nice way of getting himself out of the house to spend his Saturday mornings on his own. A trick I can thoroughly recommend to both men and women incidentally.

On one such morning quite out of the blue he asked me to accompany him to the shops. He had never made such a request before but I was becoming a young man and I guess the time had arrived for me to be of some use.

I agreed to go with him and we set off together. We were shopping for ordinary groceries, things like meat from the butchery, bread from the bakery, fruit and vegetables from the fruit & vegery, etcetera. With most of the shopping done and arms aching from the weight of the bags, suddenly Dad turned and walked into a large department store called Edwin Jones. Inside it was crowded beyond belief, people were jammed absolutely solid, packed in like passengers on a Tokyo train. As we struggled through the crowd towards the delicatessen counter he turned and looked over his shoulder at me, "I always comes in here on a Saturday morning!" he said. "Really?" I replied, "What the hell do you get in here?" "The bloody miseries!" he snarled.

I loved my father's sense of humour, he wasn't a funny man, not a laugh a minute anyway, but when the time was right he could lay you out with a one liner that a pro-comedy writer would kill for.

Life is happening to us all at once and in addition to the black comedies occurring at home and at school, I was now having to deal with my burgeoning puberty. To curse my already troubled existence another wet dream transpired. It was not the first time, as you know and I'd had others in the meantime of course. Well that was okay, I always managed to clean my pyjamas in the described manner and although the mysterious eruptions were a worry when they occurred, nothing ever seemed to come of it (no pun intended) so I wasted no anxiety over them. Indeed as far as I could see, they were the nearest I was ever going to get to the real thing, so I rather looked forward to them.

However, this one presented a somewhat more complicated problem, the bloody stuff had missed my pyjamas and had squirted onto the bed-sheets. Panic! I was beside myself with trepidation and stared at the stain in demented disbelief. "My God, it looks like the map of Jamaica!" I thought madly, "What am I going to do, I can't wash the bloody bed linen? How can I possibly get the sheets off the bed and past Mum without her knowing?" Again I figured the best way to tackle it was to just scrub the stain. I crept downstairs to the kitchen, found a flannel and a glass of hot water and stole back to my bedroom. Scrub scrub scrub, I went. When I'd finished, a large area of the bed was obviously very damp, wet in fact, but I could think of no alternative. I pushed the rumpled covers over the wet patch and hoped it would dry before Mum made the bed. I even thought of making it myself, but rejected the idea immediately, she was never satisfied with anything I did and I knew she would rip it to pieces and do it again anyway!

There followed another day of abject misery as I fretted about the problem, I dreaded going home to face my mother's anger, but at the same time I wanted to get home as quickly as possible to get it over and done with, hoping all the while she hadn't seen it. In this way the day dragged interminably and by and at four o'clock I rushed home in a nervous sweat. "Hello darling," carolled mum as I arrived, "did you have a nice day?" "Yes Thanks, Mum." I called back, rushing past her, "My God, she hasn't found it, I must have cleaned it up really well!" I exclaimed jubilantly and rushing into my room threw back the bedclothes. The stain was still there as bold as if I had never laid a damp cloth on it. "Well I know she's deaf," I thought, "but now her eyesight's going as well!"

I'd been like an over wound spring all day, the relief was fantastic. It was years before I realised she had known all along and understood the problem. It wasn't even a problem, it was a perfectly normal part of

life. Even in these enlightened times kids can never quite bring themselves to believe their mum could possibly understand about sex, nor anything remotely connected with it and as for her actually doing it herself, Yeuk! The idea is out of the question!

Fate had not finished with me though, still stinging from the trauma, worse was around the corner, this time however, there was not a hint of humour in it, it was not even black comedy. It will come as no surprise to you to learn that I have always loved comedy, no matter which shade it comes in. I always worshipped the world's great comedy masters and still do, they hold a mirror up to us, they allow us to see how silly we are, they encourage us to look at our tragedies and laugh at them and at ourselves. If we are brought low by our private horrors they momentarily take our minds from them if only for a short while, they lift our spirits. give us time to recharge our batteries.

Laughter like beautiful music is therapeutic, it is part of the healing process, great clowns are put among us as part of the human survival programme, as indeed are great musicians.

I had noticed that a Marx Brother's movie was being shown at the Classic Cinema in the city centre, so on Saturday afternoon I took myself into town to see it. As I took my place in the queue I was joined by a soldier in uniform. After only a minute he asked, "Do you like the Marx Brothers movies?" "Why else am I standing here?" I thought, but he was an adult so I smiled and said, "Oh yes, I never miss one!" "Me neither!" he said. At this point the doors opened and the queue began to file into the cinema. As soon as we were inside he said, "Look, I'll tell you what, I'll treat you to the show if you buy the sweets and peanuts." "No thanks." I said, warning lights were flashing madly inside my head, I didn't have a clear idea of what they meant, but they were flashing. As we reached the box office he eased me aside and bought the tickets anyway, saying aloud, "You get the sweets son, while I take care of the tickets. Two stalls please Miss!" The girl handed him the tickets without comment and I was snared. My alarm bells were jangling now, I knew I'd been outwitted, but still had no idea where it was leading, I should have run for it then and there, but I desperately wanted to see the movie so I figured it was worth the risk, "There are a lot of people about, I can't be in any real danger, not while surrounded by people, in a cinema." I reasoned. Inside the auditorium the usherette took our tickets, tore them in two and handed him the two halves, she shone her torch briefly in my face then showed us to our seats. At first nothing untoward happened, the lights dimmed, the advertisements came and went and finally the scheduled B movie began. After a short while his hand touched my knee and lingered. My heart sank, my fears had not been unfounded, I pushed his hand away but in a few moments it was back, I pushed it aside again but this time he insisted it remain where he'd put it. I got up from my seat and moved to a seat some distance away, he followed me and I knew now that I was in serious danger, this guy meant business. I decided it would be best if I were to move to an entirely different part of the cinema altogether, several rows back in fact. I thought if I got away from him entirely he would get the message and leave me alone. I got up and made my way to the rear of the cinema, found a seat in another row and felt safely out of his reach. A few minutes passed and there he was, sitting beside me again. I was seriously frightened now, he put his hand inside my thigh and I tried to remove it but this time it was he who knocked my hand out of the way, he undid my flies and slid his hand into my crotch. It was then that I had one of my flashes of brilliance, I got up and walked out of the auditorium. I walked into the foyer and thence into the gent's toilet. "I'll stay here for a while," I thought, "and when he has forgotten me I'll sneak back inside and sit somewhere a long way away from him." Almost before I had finished the thought, he was in the toilet with me. Too late I realised my flash of brilliance had been a gross error, in fact an error of unthinkable proportions. With no longer any pretence at gentleness he grabbed me, pushed me into a cubicle and locked the door. I was struck dumb with fear, my throat constricted and I was unable to utter a sound, unable to even cry out. He took my pants down

and began to rub my flaccid penis, with his other hand he undid his own fly and let his pants drop to the floor. I stared in horror at his penis, it was already huge. In spite of my numbing fear mine became erect and as I ejaculated he bent and drank the semen from me. He was rubbing his own penis very rapidly now, "You see, you're enjoying it after all, it's really nice isn't it!" he said, as he spoke he tried to force my head down onto his own organ, but I resisted. At this he snarled irascibly, "Oh please your-bloody-self then!" he said and ejaculated all over me. Inside my head childish logic crowded out rationality, my only thought now was that this man, having got himself into trouble of this magnitude would need to cover his tracks, he would now be forced to kill me to ensure I didn't tell on him. This became my uppermost thought and I was close to fainting with terror at the fear of death.

WHAM, CRASH, BLAM! The cubicle door was shouldered open and a pair of friendly hands grabbed me, whisking me away from his clutches while less gentle hands seized him. The toilet was swarming with policemen. I never thought I would be pleased to see a room full of cops, not that I had anything to fear from them, I simply hoped they would stay away from me that's all, but not right at this moment. "Are you alright?" asked the one who'd grabbed me. "No I'm not, I'm bloody scared shitless!" I replied, trembling from head to toe. "Well there's nothing to be frightened of now son, it's all over, we've got the bastard!" he said.

I was bundled out of the building into a waiting police car and in less than five minutes was sitting in Southampton Central Police Station, a blanket wrapped around me and a cup of scalding tea in my hand. "I've sent a car to fetch your parents, son," said the desk sergeant kindly, "as soon as they get here we will have to remove your clothes and keep them, I'll take your shoes now, if you don't mind!" He wasn't asking, he simply bent down and removed them. I knew why, the evidence was all over them. I was still shaking violently, "Don't worry lad, you're safe now and your dad is bringing some clean clothes for you!" he said.

I was still trembling when my father came through the doorway. "Where is the bastard?" he cried, "I'll kill the filthy son-of-a-bitch with my bare hands!" "Now, now, calm down, Mr Harrison, don't you worry yourself about that sir, we'll deal with him!" said the sergeant. My dad put his arm around my shoulders and handed me a paper carrier bag containing some clean clothing. After I'd put them on and my other clothing had been taken away I was escorted into a cell to identify the prisoner. I entered and he was sitting with his head bowed, a picture of dejection. He also looked as if he'd met with a serious accident. "Deal with him? They've already dealt with him!" I thought. No doubt the injuries would appear on the police report as abrasions resulting from resisting arrest. Personally I was delighted with his injuries, I would have liked to have seen more! "Walk into a door did you?" I snarled. He didn't look up. I affirmed he was the man who did the deed and was returned to the desk, where I answered more questions to complete my statement, which I then signed. I was then told I would be taken home. In fact my dad and I were taken home by the Sweeney in a squad car no less. (the Sweeney Todd - The Flying Squad) I had recovered some of my poise by this time and was now quite excited by the prospect, the Flying Squad was big deal!

The two young policemen in the car did their best to cheer me up, I sat in the front seat and was even allowed to switch on the flashing lights and the siren. Actually British police cars were equipped with alarm bells in those days but the effect on me was the same, by the time I got home I was feeling a lot calmer. Mum however was not, she was in deep shock, she grabbed me and held me tight, "Oh Christ, are you alright son?" she wailed. "Yeah, I'm alright now, Mum," I replied with great feeling, "it's okay, calm down, I've had enough drama for one day, I really can't take any more, go and put the kettle on and make us a nice cup of tea, I really would love a cup of tea. Please!"

The police had been called to the scene by the usherette of course. In her statement she said she was

alerted when she saw the fear in my eyes as she shone her torch into my face, from then on she kept a close watch on us. Observing the same small boy moving from seat to seat followed by the soldier, she watched even closer, when I escaped into the toilet and he followed me in there, she simply called in the law. Well good for her, I feel I owe her. If you are still alive madam I hope you read this. Thank you for your effort, I have never forgotten you.

I returned to school and got on with life, I never spoke of it, while at home the subject was never raised again, not ever, neither did I anguish over it but simply folded it quickly and neatly away among my growing list of bad experiences. I had gained some useful information though, I would never again make the foolish mistake I had made on that fateful afternoon, my trust in people, never very good, receded even further and for a while I regarded every grown man as a child molester.

My mind began to play a new game, from this moment on in times of great stress the familiar memory of the hoarse drawl of W.C Fields would ring inside my head. "Take a word of advice, m'boy!" it said, "Never give a sucker an even break!" "Oh really," I said sardonically, "are you an expert then?" "Hope t' tell yah!" he replied. The disembodied voice was to materialize in my mind often, I had many amusing conversations with it.

Back at school a man who committed himself more kindly to my memory was a teacher by the name of Mr Wandlass. A soft gentle soul, at the outbreak of war he was one of the people evacuated along with the children to a village called Overton. He fell in love with the place and if there ever happened to be a child in the classroom who'd been at Overton with him, he would engage that child in an almost private conversation, they would reminisce about the good old days and the wonderful times they'd shared there. In this respect Wandlass was as vulnerable as Wally Previtt, for instance if I didn't like the lesson, I had only to drop the word 'Overton' into the air for his eyes to mist over and he would chat on about the beauty of the place for the next ten minutes. Obviously he loved the beautiful English countryside and indeed the country life, but he never returned to it. He made his mark with me however and found his way into this book as a result of something entirely different.

Mr Wandlass treated everybody with the respect each person deserved, it was he who asked the dyslexic boy if he would like to have a go at reading to the class? "There's no pressure Peter," he'd say, "it's up to you old son!" By the same token it was he who gave Raymond Reynolds the same option, Ray was one of our gang of four you'll remember and he was afflicted with a very serious stutter, he was a great guy and very very funny, but he stammered terribly. During the lessons, in common with all levels of education, we were asked questions and were required from time to time to stand up and give a dissertation on the subject, during reading lessons we were required to read aloud to the class etcetera. Nobody ever asked Ray to do anything of that nature, nobody that is except Mr Wandlass. "D' you wanna have a crack at it Ray? You don't have to, if you'd rather not!" Most times Ray would clamber enthusiastically to his feet and say, "G-guh-gah-gah-gah-gaaah- Yeah! Muh-ma-mu-muh-muh - If yuh-yuh-aah-yah-yah-yah, you can stah-staaah-stand it Sir, suh-suh-suh-so can I!" then he'd read whatever passage was required and sit down well satisfied with himself. "B-b-b-b-buh-buh-buh-baah-baaah- Thank you Sir!" He'd suddenly blurt. Ray often surprised me by stuttering a completely different consonant from the one at the beginning of the word he finally used, I used to wonder if it was part of his affliction or did he just change his mind at the last minute? You could never tell with Ray, it could even have been his little joke.

I was nearing the age of fourteen, school leaving age in those days, one memorable morning at assembly, Mr Coare the headmaster, delightedly informed us all that as of a certain imminent date, the school leaving age was to be raised to fifteen. After a quick calculation the kids who discovered they would have to stay on for an extra year let out a groan and those that didn't have to let out a cheer.

“Don't count your chickens before they're hatched!” said the headmaster, “Those of you born between such and such a date will stay on and those born between so and so can leave, I may add that those of you who are staying on are being given a wonderful opportunity to better yourselves and you should be very pleased with the news!” he concluded.

I explained on page one that 'Arrison's Law is similar to but not to be confused with Murphy's Law and consistent with that rule my birthday fell in the cusp if you take my point. I raised my hand, “Harrison?” he asked, “Please Sir, I was born on the sixth of March, nineteen thirty three, what am I supposed to do?” He paused and scratched his chin, “Hmm, yes, I see what you mean,” he said, “well, I think you'll have a choice, if you choose to leave we can't stop you, but if you decide to stay with us we certainly won't stand in your way!”

I was ecstatic and I elected to stay on for the extra year, I had received next to no education until now anyway, I knew it would be better for me to take advantage of the proffered year, but also I must confess that more importantly, to my way of thinking anyway, my very slightly younger mates would be staying on and I wanted to stay with them! Let me be honest about this, I was having a bloody good time, I know the four of us were very happy. I mean truly happy, our class at this school as it existed at that particular time was bloody wonderful. I really don't think any of us would ever have wanted to leave! I went home with the great news.

My parents were very sympathetic but unhelpful. “Son,” began my father, “you understand that we lost everything we owned in 1942. Absolutely everything! We have no home, no furniture, no money, nothing! We have to start again, completely from scratch. At the moment we are still waiting for our home in Spring Road to be rebuilt and when it's complete we'll have to find the money to refurnish it. The government will give us something towards the cost, but it'll take a more than that to get us back on our feet. We need your help, son! We really need you to go to work and bring home a wage and no matter how small that wage may seem, it will help and we need all the help we can get.”

I was disappointed and angry, but not angry with them, not directly. I understood, I was not a fool, I'd been through the trauma too, I was there when it had happened, experienced it with them and under those circumstances could hardly refuse. Indeed I would not have wanted to.

I went to school the next day and broke the sad news to the class. The first to comment was Miss Corps. She looked at me for a long second, then said, “Well thank heavens for that, so we're going to be free of you at last Harrison! Now perhaps we can get some work done around here!” however, I failed to detect any real conviction in her voice and took it to be less abrasive than it sounded.

A couple of days later the gang of four were standing in the playground talking, when a group of girls from our class approached us. “We asked Miss Corps if she really was glad you're leaving Ken.” said one. “Did you really,” I replied “and what did she say?” “She said, “No, things are going to be a bit dull around here with Harrison gone!” “Did she really say that?” I laughed, “Well that's lovely and it's very nice of you to pass it on to me!” and I meant it. I was knocked out, I'd always known her abrasive remarks was not intended to be taken too literally but it was doubly rewarding to be told this news. Miss Corps was a great teacher and I mean great! In truth she encouraged my independent, possibly even anarchistic spirit, nurtured it and encouraged it to bloom. Given that some discipline had to be exercised and given that when the occasion arose she was forced to punish me, never at any time did she attempt to suppress me. Besides, it was always my own fault and as I have explained already, the punishment was invariably invited by myself.

A few years ago I was travelling on a bus and recognised her sitting across the aisle from of me. I stared at the now grey-haired old lady and will regret to my dying day that I didn't get up and sit down beside her. I should have thanked her for her encouragement and I cannot for the life of me think why I didn't?