

## Chapter Three

### J.I.Thornycroft

When John Lennon was credited with uttering the legendary observation: "Life is what happens to you while you're planning something else." it came as no blinding revelation to me, the words summed up my life in a nutshell long before he quoted it. "Your secret is safe with me, cock!" I thought tersely. (It was originally coined by an American female journalist whose name now escapes me, however that does not affect this story)

My tumultuous childhood years over, apparently nothing had changed, life continued as fateful as ever, I was entering the workforce a year before necessary and in the wrong profession! I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I would rectify the situation as soon as I was able, but for now I had to go with the flow.

My father had arranged for me to become a sheet metalworker in the shipyard where he worked. He believed he was doing me a great service, he hated the iron foundry with a deep and bitter loathing, so much so in fact, that keeping me out of it was his only goal. A bitterly reluctant iron-moulder himself, the last thing he wanted for his son was a life-sentence in an iron-foundry.

He was, as you may recall, the son of a successful optician, but after his father's death and a decent period of grief his mother married a seafarer, a lowly bedroom steward and fate had tossed young Herbie a curved ball, he was put to work as an apprentice iron-moulder and ended his working life in an iron-foundry. Ironically (and irony was indeed much to the fore here), he became imbued with the working-class below-stairs attitude, the drastic changes in his fortunes developing in him the narrow vision of a factory worker. Forced into touching his forelock and keeping his place, he sincerely believed this was where he (and therefore we) belonged. Some years into the future his employers would have good cause to regret their patrician attitude, meanwhile he believed what he was doing for me was for my own good, convinced he was doing the right thing.

After serving his time he escaped the foundry's black grind for a while and by following in his step-father's footsteps managed to spend his younger years at sea, albeit in a lowly unskilled servile role. Seafarers enjoy a feeling of freedom even if it's only an illusion and I know from later conversations with him that they were his happiest years. However, fate, fear, caution and in some cases an all pervading love for one's partner, sometimes forces us into making a rash decision or a crazy sacrifice and as a result of such a decision, my father placed himself back in his personal hellhole, the iron-foundry. Brainwashed into believing his place in the social scheme of things was limited to this, he was caught like a mouse in a cage in which the only route to the food was through the treadmill. "Well, that may be so in my case," he reasoned, "but I'll make damn sure my son has a better chance in life than I had."

A laudable attitude you might say, but unfortunately as far as my father was concerned life in the sheet-metal department of a shipyard was infinitely better and a long way up the social ladder from an iron-foundry and the fact that I had no intention of being there at all was irrelevant.

The class system is a normal human foible, It exist everywhere, even in so called egalitarian societies, the basic premise being simply that if you have more money, you can afford to live in a nicer house and have a bigger car. In England however, it runs deeper than that, it's a caste system, a madness the tentacles of which infiltrate the whole populace and it's not just a case of 'rich versus the poor', it runs even deeper than that, touching everybody. The king is better than a lord, lords are better than earls,

earls are better than viscounts and viscounts are better than their butlers. By the same token the butler is better than the footman who is better than the housemaid who is better than the kitchen drudge who is better than the shoeshine boy and even he is better than the man who cleans the toilets. Even toilet cleaners have a caste system, for instance if your job is cleaning the office staff loo, you're are a step up the ladder from the man who cleans workmen's toilets. It follows therefore, that in a normal working class society, a sheet-metal worker, (having a safer cleaner job) is better than a foundry worker. My dad had a word in the right ear and I was enrolled in the light-plating department of John I Thornycroft's shipyard and on the day in question he came home in a state of euphoria, declaring I should feel very proud and grateful for this wonderful opportunity. I nodded dumbly, it was pointless to explain how I felt.

On my first morning, the bus-ride to the factory was not without it's lighter side. "Morning Bert, so this is the latest addition to the mighty British workforce then, is it?" someone asked, "Blimey! he won't make a lot of difference will he? He's only half a pint!" said another, "Oh I wouldn't say that, he'll be very useful for sending into those awkward little places nobody else can get into!" someone observed wryly and accurately, as it transpired. "Don't you worry son, you'll be alright in the sheet-metal shop, kind old Harry Phillips will take care of him, eh lads? Harry will look after 'im, eh? Ho Ho Ho!" We arrived at the factory and after checking me in at the gate-keepers office my dad took me to the Time-Office where I was introduced to the clerk responsible for the sheet-metal department's personnel and left me in his care.

"Upon arriving in the morning," began the clerk, "you'll come to the appropriate window (at this office) and you'll pick up your check." he pointed to a window and handed me a brass disk the size of an old English penny, a number was stamped into it's surface. "Keep your check in your pocket at all times and memorise the number, and remember, each time you collect your check, you're booked in at the precise time you pick it up, okay?" I nodded, "At the end of the day you return to the same window and you throw your check into the box provided. at lunchtimes, you throw it in the box at mid-day and pick it up again at one o'clock, alright? D' you understand all that?" Again I nodded assent. Being my first morning he wrote my personal details in the largest office ledger I'd ever seen in my life (about thirty centimetres square). Then picking up an internal telephone, he asked someone to escort me to Harry Phillips.

A few moments later I was led a fair distance to a huge workshop and was taken up a short flight of stairs into the office, the windows of which commanded a panoramic view of the workshop. Phillips was standing, chin in hand, surveying his domain. Glancing briefly at me, without a word he handed me over to another man who was standing beside him. "A new lad for ye, Dinger." he said, in a very soft Scottish brogue and turning to me added, "Go wi' Mr Bell, laddie."

Dinger Bell, (as he was called) was the second in command, the under-foreman or charge-hand. leading me out of the office and through the clattering workshop, he lad me past row upon row of gigantic machines, already roaring with activity their enormous fly-wheels spinning rapidly as their great blades sliced through sheets of steel as if it were paper. A large mechanical hammer was beating time rapidly on a galvanised iron sheet held by a man who moved it about under the hammer, moulding it into the shape of a huge metal mushroom.

I took this fascinating panoply in as I followed on Dinger's heels. Eventually we arrived at a thirty something year old man standing at his workbench, "Here you are, John," he said, "a new mate for you, show him the ropes and get him started."

The man didn't reply, ignoring Bell completely instead he turned to another man working at a similar bench nearby. "Oi! Frank!" he bellowed, "What about returning that fuckin' riveting block you

borrowed from me yesterday?” and turning to me said, “Well don't just fuckin' stand there, you stupid little cunt, go and fetch it!” I was stunned, his foul language had taken me completely by surprise, I had no idea adults used those words! I don't know why, but until then I thought only little boys said them and only in private when there were no girls around. I was rooted to the spot, he stared at me for a moment and then as if to himself but obviously for my ears, he snarled, “Jesus Christ almighty, what've they sent me? Hey, come on, don't fuckin' stand there, move yourself!” My mind snapped back into gear, I ran to the man called Frank who handed me a small rectangular steel block, which fitted comfortably into my hand, “Hallo,” he said, “What's your name?” “Ken.” I replied, he grinned, “Okay Ken,” he said, “Don't be too upset by John, he's alright really.” I ran back to the other man and held the little block out to him. “I don't fuckin' want it! It's not for me ya dopey cunt! Get in there with it!” he gesticulated towards a metal chest of drawers that he was obviously constructing. Doing as I was bid, I wondered. For some unfathomable reason he sounded permanently angry.

Climbing inside the box-like construction, I found a packet of rivets waiting for me. John put the top on the chest, then peering at me through the space (where one of the drawers would eventually slide) he snarled, “Right! Pay attention! Your job is to stick one of them fuckin' rivets through these little fuckin' holes and then hold it in place with your block, while I fuckin' flattens it on this side with me fuckin' hammer. All right? D' you understand?” “Yeah sure, okay!” I replied, my brain reeling under the barrage of vitriolic cursing. In spite of my surprise I pushed a rivet into one of the holes and he hammered it flat. “Keep yer fucking block on it, while I rounds it off .” he said, my working life had begun.

The din inside the metal box was excruciating but the turmoil inside my head drowned it out. I'd heard and even used occasional bad words myself, in the school playground, they were not unfamiliar to me, but I never expected to hear a grown man using them. Furthermore I had never heard them used to such an outrageous extent nor with such vitriolic power and bizarre effect. John had put me into a mild state of shock.

We worked steadily for a while, but unused to the activity, eventually my muscles began to tire, arms aching I shouted through the holes to him, “Sorry John, but I've gotta take a break, mate, my arms hurt!” “**WHAT!**” he screamed. And throwing down his hammer with remarkable violence, he exclaimed, “**Un-fuckin'-believable!**” Again I'd never heard a perfectly ordinary word divided in two by *that* word before and unable to contain myself at the absurd use of profanity I began to laugh. “Oh, so you think it's fuckin' funny do yer?” he snarled, “Well you won't find it so fuckin' amusing when you try to get out of that box old son, I'm going for my tea break now. Let's see you laugh that off!” and he too burst into raucous laughter.

His mate Frank walked over and the two men were joined by a group of workmen, all standing in a circle around the chest and laughing at my plight. I clambered through a narrow drawer-space and stood up. “Very fuckin' funny!” I snarled, “Highly fuckin' amusing!” and I stalked away. Their eyes followed me in astonishment, “Shit! He's even smaller than he looks!” exclaimed one of them.

At that precise moment I figured that if I had to be there, the obvious thing was to start off as I meant to go proceed. “If you can't beat 'em, pretend to join 'em!” I reasoned. I'd realised in that instant that in order to survive in this place I had to learn to blend in and very fuckin' quickly! To some extent anyway. “And even more important,” I chided myself, “remain alert, this will not be the last little joke they'll try to pull on you. You can bet on that!” I would never fall for that particular ruse again, from that point on I kept a wary eye on the size of the exit aperture of any space I was ordered to crawl into. I was quite correct, there were other japes of course, some succeeded, others were transparent enough for me to avoid. For instance when told to go to the store for a bucket of blast, it seemed a reasonable

request in a place where blast furnaces were commonplace, but I correctly interpreted it to mean a bucket of wind. "Piss off, John," I replied, "I'm not that fuckin' stupid!" Some days later while working in an awkward position I was unable to reach into a deeply inaccessible corner. I told John and he called in to me, "Alright, come out of there, You'll hafta nip across to the store and get a long rest." I crawled out of the cranny ran to the store and said, "I need a long rest mate." "Sure." said the Storeman. I stood waiting while he served several people and eventually my patience ran out, "Hey!" I yelled, "You! What about my fuckin' long rest, for Christ's sake?" He glowered at me, "You've been hanging around here for ten fuckin' minutes, how long a rest d'you think you're entitled to?" "Shit!" I thought, "I've been had!" they'd got me this time! I walked out, "Okay," I thought, I'll play it your way and finding a gap, I hid under the Boat-Shed for a couple of hours. (the workshop used for building small craft) When I returned to the sheet metal department, John was furious, "Where the fuck have you been, ya little arsehole? You've been gone for three hours!" "That was the shortest long rest they had!" I replied. He was not amused, apparently I was no fun at all. For some reason, I was never a victim of the usual greasing that the female employees inflicted on new boys. There were half a dozen female workers in the department and they would grab a newcomer, remove his pants and smear thick, black, machine grease over his genitalia and pubic-hair. A horrible mess and with no showers or proper washroom facilities it was difficult to remove. Maybe I didn't appeal to them, maybe they figured I was not worth the effort. I possessed an obvious attitude problem even at that tender age and maybe they thought I was too bloody clever by half, but for whatever reasons they had, I was never selected for their somewhat dubious treat. Secretly I was bitterly disappointed, of course.

I walked into the workshop one morning to find Leslie, a boy my own age and size, hanging from a hook by the back of the belt around his waist. By this time he was in severe pain and beginning to turn blue in the face. In my opinion the joke had gone far enough, so I helped him down, fully expecting to be hoisted up in his place, however nothing happened. I was surprised by this and relieved.

There was one boy, Tony Croucher, who nobody ever attempted to harm, fifteen years of age he was solidly built but not over-large. He rejoiced in the strange nick-name of 'Spud'. Even more curious and of greater interest to me was that he was never interfered with in any way, which I found odd until I discovered he was the local amateur boxing champion. So not only was he left unscathed for physical reasons, he was revered and treated with great respect. Even by the older men.

I pondered on this for a while and one day approached him and introduced myself. Even then he already had the broad flat nose of a boxer, but other than that he was an extremely good looking young man. He was different from the rest in another way, even when wearing overalls he gave the impression of being impeccably dressed. Even wearing a collar and tie. "You don't seem the boxer type to me." I said after the formalities, "I'm not, well not really mush." he replied, "I only do that for fun, I'm really an opera singer!" I was gobsmacked! "An opera singing boxer working in a bloody shipyard? what the hell was going on? "Well what are you doing here then?" I asked, "My parents insisted on it and besides, we all gotta start some-fuckin'-where ain't we!" he snarled, "I go to private singing lessons for my musical training. Anyway, Jimmy Edwards tells me you're gonna be a jazz drummer. Is that right?" "Yeah, that's right!" I agreed, "Well there you are then! Are you having lessons?" he asked, "Not yet, I haven't even got any drums yet." I replied, "Well you'd better get started soon mate, Jimmy says you're definitely going to be a drummer, you've got all the right stuff in you, according to him. I go to me singing lessons once a week and as soon as I've finished this fuckin' apprenticeship, I'm outa here! They won't see my arse for dust, mush!" he added scornfully. "Me neither!" I agreed passionately, "I gotta go now, but I'll talk to you later. I think we've got something in common." "Bloody right!" he agreed and

we became friends. (I'll explain about Jimmy Edwards later)

It was 1947, I was fourteen years and still playing childish games. One Saturday morning, while swinging along some parallel bars in the children's section of the park at Houndwell, I missed a rung, fell, and broke my left wrist. I knew it was broken as soon as I hit the ground and took myself off to South Hants Hospital, where I was duly x-rayed, plaster of paris'd and sent on my way. When I arrived home my mother did her usual routine. "It serves you right, my son!" she said, "Why don't you grow up? I've told you a thousand times to be careful, but do you listen? You keep doing these bloody stupid things, I hope you don't think this entitles you to stay at home!" "No I bloody don't." I replied, perhaps a trifle too enthusiastically. Privately I thought, "Anything but that, you stupid cow!" I'd arrived at the age when boys believe any time spent with their mother was not only a waste of time and wimpish, but a fate comparable with hell on Earth.

I went to work the following morning and reported to the charge-hand. "I've broken my arm, Dinger," I said, "Can you find me something to do while it heals?" "Whadaya mean, Dinger? Mister fuckin' Bell to you, ya cheeky little bastard!" He snarled viciously. "Whoops! Silly mistake." I thought instantly, but kept my mouth shut. He took me into the office where I repeated my request to the foreman. "My arm will be in plaster for six weeks, Mr Phillips, I don't want to stay home all that time." I said very truthfully.

He stood looking at me reflectively for a few moments, then said, "Aye, I've nae doot we can use you in here." he waved a hand, indicating the office. Dinger looked at me anew, his eyes still blazing with malevolence. "Oh-oh, I definitely got off on the wrong foot with him." I reasoned, "I've made a bloody enemy." "I'm sorry Mr Bell I really didn't mean to be disrespectful, it just slipped out." I said, hoping to soften the atmosphere. "Really!" he snapped, "Well, if you're going to be working in this office for six weeks, it had better not slip out again!"

Dinger Bell's tongue may have been tart but Harry Phillips was the real tartar. I had discovered he was the most feared man in the entire shipyard, hence the remark made on the bus on my very first morning. The workmen feared and hated him, even those who worked in the other departments for some unaccountable reason? Ironically they also admired him, respected his great skill, Harry was an artist in metal and they knew it and if anything that added to their fear and loathing.

Whenever Harry Phillips came in view, grown men literally quaked. His real power stemmed from their fear of being sacked of course. This was at a time when most families were trying to rebuild their homes after a world war, plus their horror of the great depression had not yet faded, there was fear in the air that if you made one false move you'd be out on your ear. Instant dismissal and unemployed men stood optimistically outside the factory only too anxious to fill your shoes! That's why they were there! Trade Unions had successfully battled against this practice but the memories of harsh times died slowly and the men still feared their boss to an incredible degree.

It's important to note here that at this time I had not the remotest intention of remaining in the industry, I was here against my will and apart from having enough common sense to avoid unnecessary bullying I feared nobody. However I was not prepared for the close proximity of Harry Phillips and felt nervous. I'd been left sitting alone for I guess about an hour, when he came bustling into his office rubbing his hands together. Removing his cap, he hung it on a hook behind the door. The first surprise was that he was completely bald and the second, he was ordinary. "A cup of tea is what we need now, Ken," he said, "why don't you make us one?" The equipment for performing the domestic chore was right there in the office, so I did. When I served it he bent and from a drawer under his desk, took a large tin of biscuits and opening it held it out to me, "Take two!" he insisted. As I did so he enquired about how I'd broken my arm? And when I told him he grinned, "Och weel! Ye'll need stop those silly games the noo!

If ye keep having time off for injury it'll cost ye a packet, son!" I relaxed completely and enjoyed a long chat over a cup of tea.

Basically apart from making tea, I had very little to do and mused, "Harrison my old son, the next six weeks will be the best six weeks you'll ever spend in this fuckin' hell-hole, so make the best of it!" and I was not wrong.

Mostly I ran errands, collected and delivered working plans or blueprints as they were called, to and from the Drawing Office. I also carried messages to and from the main administration office in the same building. At other times I was sent to the main store to collect items for some of the busy workmen. Other than that I sat in the office with Harry drinking tea and reading the newspaper. He often talked to me and showed me his 'trinkets' as he described them. I was impressed and so I should have been, they were impressive. Sitting along the window ledge immediately above his desk was a collection of small ornaments. A tinsmith of the old school, Harry Phillips was one of the artisans who took great pride in their work (and they'd already begun dieing out even then) Harry was one of the last of the old style craftsman (and so was my father, although I didn't know it at the time).

I'm sure you are aware, that building iron ships was and is a gargantuan operation. Everything is enormous, an ocean liner's funnel, for instance, is big enough to house several motor transport buses. An average sized air duct is a metal mushroom over twelve foot tall and fifteen foot wide. For the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the English measuring system, it's really very simple, the standard measurement of 'one foot' is approximately the length of your own foot'. Mine are nowhere near that length, being only nine inches, but you know what I mean. So it follows that men who build large ships, (rather than those employed in the aircraft manufacturing industry for instance) tend to think big. Accuracy to one thousandth of an inch or a micro-millimetre is not a standard requirement. This was not the case with Harry Phillips however, his 'trinkets' were tiny and absolutely perfect. Made from brass or copper and beaten with loving care, each one was a tribute to his craftsmanship. Examples included a tiny square-rigged ship under full sail, another was a small brass shield with a heavily embossed copper inlay, probably his heraldic clan shield. My favourite piece however was a copper sphere the size of a golf ball and beaten from a single piece of metal. No joins were visible and even had I been able to understand higher mathematics, my mind still boggled at the figure times 'Pi R squared' required to develop the shape of a piece of metal needed to be drawn and cut before laying a hammer on it? Not to mention the secret of beating such a thing into perfect shape? They were superbly crafted, a jeweller would have been proud of them.

Harry loved his job and I envied him a great deal, not his job nor his position, I coveted neither of those things, what I envied was that he was doing what he wanted to do. Something he loved and was good at. Harry Phillips worked at the thing he loved most and I suppose becoming the foreman of his department was the most logical thing that could happen to him. I don't suppose for a moment that he even considered turning the offer down when it came, nevertheless I had the distinct impression he missed using his undoubted skills.

When my arm healed I left the office and was put to work once again on the factory floor. However, for me, the situation out there had changed and I'll explain. There are things in a factory that school-leavers are expected to do, pencil sharpening jobs I call them. Sweeping the floor was one, making the tea for the morning and afternoon tea breaks was another. In the latter case it was a production of Cecil B De-Mille proportions and all the younger lads shared in the chore. There were dozens of cups to wash, the urn to be filled and the water boiled, the tea itself had to be brewed, the crates of milk had to be collected from wherever the milk delivery man had left them, then the milk was poured into each separate cup. The whole process had to be completed and the tea ready to drink by nine-thirty when you

served it. So if it was your turn to make it you needed to start as soon as you arrived, at seven thirty. I didn't object at all, quite the contrary in fact, I enjoyed doing it, it meant that twice a day I escaped from the noise, the filth and muscle aching misery of riveting. However, shortly after I started working there the employers and unions reached an agreement to abolish the afternoon tea break, provided the men could finish work and go home at five fifteen instead of five thirty. This innovative move was with greeted with enthusiasm by everyone except me, in my view washing cups was preferable to being curled up jammed inside a filthy rust encrusted metal box holding a steel block on a rivet while someone on the outside banged bloody hell out of it! The first two years spent performing these menial tasks was a prelude to starting on your indentured five year apprenticeship, which began when you reached the age of sixteen. It was useful in that you were put to work with a number of differing specialist tradesmen and to a degree it gave you some insight into what you would be doing for the rest of your life. I did not like what I saw!

Another task which befell teenage boys was in point of fact a scam and involved money. It was hereditary, or perhaps inherited is a more accurate description. If you were lucky and the men liked you, you might get the job but you had to wait your turn, furthermore you had to wait until a position became vacant.

This only happened when the senior apprentice finished his five year training period and became a fully qualified tradesman. When this occurred the next oldest became the new senior apprentice and all the boys below him moved up one place, The position of Senior Apprentice was a disciplinary position which held with it no special privileges, it merely meant that if a younger boy got into serious trouble the senior apprentice was hauled up before the foreman to explain why he had not kept the lad in line, therefore it was in his own interests to bully the younger boys or at least maintain firm control over them, even including his closest friend. Meanwhile, in all cases moving up one place meant a less onerous task, the boy who did the worst cleaning job went on to do a nicer cleaning job and the lad who washed the dirty cups moved up to pouring the milk into the clean ones, etcetera, etcetera, ad infinitum. The scam I mentioned was of interest to all the boys because as I say there was money to be made, which of course is why you had to wait your turn. It was really quite simple, I have already described how the brass disc with the employee's number stamped into it (his check) was picked up from the time office upon his arrival, hence the phrase, 'checking in' right? In theory, the employee then kept it in his pocket until it was time to go home, at which point he 'checked out'. by throwing it into a box that was placed in the time office window at the end of each work session. Well none of the workmen wanted to waste their precious time queuing up to throw a piddly brass disk into a box, they simply payed the apprentices to do it for them. Strictly against the rules it was also a factory tradition, no one was game to put an end to it, not even the very top brass. I suppose their fag system operated in a vaguely similar way at English public schools, anyway, whatever their reasons they never interfered with the smooth running of the operation. On reflection, I suppose had they done so the ensuing chaos would have been horrendous. Can you imagine a thousand workers, each one a potential soccer hooligan, simultaneously attempting to throw their discs into half a dozen small wooden boxes? My God, the mind really does boggle! Well be that as it may, this system though illicit presented men and boys alike with an open marketplace.

As I have already explained, if he was lucky an older boy might inherit this 'check round' when the senior apprentice graduated. However, there were several 'rounds' and as every one moved up a place it was the practice when a position became vacant for the eligible boys to go shopping. That is to say they went around the workshop soliciting for the coming vacant 'Check round'. The men chose the boy they favoured most and it was he who got the job therefore because of this 'open marketplace' it was possible

for the round to be disseminated among several boys, who simply added the new customers to their existing ones.

Dotted around the workshop in strategic places were enamel mugs or tin cups, when the men arrived at their work stations they simply put their checks in the cup belonging to the boy of their choice and from then on it became his responsibility. At the end of both work sessions (morning and afternoon) the boy would empty the checks from the cup into his hand and when the factory whistle blew he and his colleagues went to the time office and threw the checks into the appropriate boxes. After a short while the lad knew by heart who each check belonged to and if the man forgot to drop it in the cup the boy would go and ask him for it. If he didn't, he got his arse kicked later. On Friday afternoons each boy would visit his 'clients' and collect his payment for the 'favour'. At sixpence a head if he had a large round he could double his wages. This was not to be sneezed at, the wage for a school leaver when I started work was nineteen and sixpence a week (about ninety five cents in today's money) and don't let me hear anybody say that was a lot of money way back then 'cos it wasn't! It was a bloody pittance! As I was saying, when the plaster cast was removed from my arm and the time came for me to leave the comfort of the office, things had altered for me. Instead of returning to these menial tasks I was sent to work with a man called Nobby Church. "So? What is so special about that?" you must be exclaiming. Well you see, Harry Phillips had become fond of me, we had got along fine in the office and he thought he was doing me a favour by putting me with his 'star' worker. Nobby was Harry's pride and joy and it was hardly surprising, you see Nobby was another Harry Phillips!

He was a craftsman, a fanatical sheet-metal worker, a zealot no less. His every spare moment was spent studying the craft. At night school, day school, at Southampton Technical College and eventually even Southampton University, you name the place and Nobby had studied there. His workbench was tucked away in the far top left hand corner of the workshop and although still young he was in a privileged position, he had rarely to dirty his hands. He was a marker, the chap who did the brain work. He spent not all but most of his time interpreting the hieroglyphics found on blueprint drawings and he then transferred them onto the actual metal sheets, other men then took them away and did the donkey work. cutting them to size, drilling and shaping them. Nobby was a favoured worker and indeed he deserved to be, he was very special. Therefore as his 'lad' I was also in a similar position. However, unlike Harry, Nobby was not fooled, he recognised in me someone who did not share their enthusiasm, he recognised a philistine instantly.

We got on okay in a superficial way, he knew I was not impressed and I knew that I would not be staying long though how I was to get out I didn't yet know, suffice to say here that we tolerated each other and did the best we could under the circumstances.

It was while I was working for him however that something occurred which made all the difference and it set the ball rolling for the changes I would eventually make regarding my future. One morning Nobby asked me to collect some items he required from the sheet metal department's Store. I sought out Dinger Bell, asked for a requisition form and took it along to the Storeman. When I arrived there it was the senior apprentice who was sitting behind the desk, apparently in charge of the place. Only the previous day I had seen him sitting at a welding bench, I was aware of who he was, but I didn't know him if you take my point.

I was fourteen years old and he was nearly twenty one, a million light years apart in this kind of hierarchy. "Hello," I said, "What are you doing in here?" "We all hafta do a few weeks of our last year in the stores mush, it is so's we can learn the procedures." he replied, "You work for Nobby Church don't you, what does he want this time?" I handed the order form over the counter to him, he went to the shelves to get the items and as he did so he continued talking to me. "When do you start your

time?" he asked, using the colloquial factory term for my apprenticeship. "I won't be starting my time," I said, "I'm going to be a jazz drummer!" "Oh really?" he said, a sardonic note creeping into his voice, "So you're going to be a jazz drummer are you? Well that's very interesting, I'm already a drummer, what sort of a drum kit do you have?" Once again I was taken completely by surprise, I was childishly unaware that musicians worked at menial tasks. "I haven't got one yet," I replied, "but I want a Premier kit one day. Do you have a kit?" I asked. "Of course I have!" he exclaimed, "How else could I be a drummer! I play in the band at the Royal Pier Pavilion Ballroom, plus any other gigs I can pick up here and there." He handed me the items I had been sent to fetch, "Here, take this stuff to Nobby before he comes looking for you, he'll go spare if you keep him waiting, come back and see me when you get a chance, I'm always interested in talking about drums." "What's your name?" I asked, "Jimmy Edwards," he replied, "call me Jim." "Bloody Hell! I've heard of you!" I said incredulously, "Oh I'll be back, I most definitely will be back!" I said and delighted beyond measure I tore myself away and delivered the requisitions to Nobby.

I cannot speak of today's altered situation, but back then with the exemption of the established symphony orchestras, in every town in the western world large or small, anywhere on the planet, there were always a handful of musicians who did the majority of the work available and the demarcation lines were very strong. Nowadays young people seem to form themselves into small working groups and then stay together as such for ever, but back in those days there was a huge freelance situation and the best players got the best gigs. I suppose it still exists to some extent but hardly on the same grand scale. It was a varied mixture, those who could sight read well did the theatre and/or big band gigs, plus some jazz club appearances. Many extremely good players who didn't read so well did the pubs, weddings and bar-mitzvahs and the very best of these also played in the jazz clubs. In each town there were established bands comprising the best of both worlds and in the capital cities the studio session world *per se* employed possibly more reading jazz musicians than any other kind. The rest of the musical fraternity shared whatever work was left, it was referred to by all as 'being on the scuffle' and it comprised of the aforesaid weddings, bar-mitzvahs, 21<sup>st</sup> birthday parties and those kinds of functions. You may regard the above description a generalisation and it is, but on the whole it pictures the then scene well. For years in some circles and in particular the classical world, it was a widely held belief that jazz musicians couldn't read music at all and in fact had no idea what they were doing. It was complete nonsense of course and fortunately, during the nineteen eighties Wynton Marsalis brought an end to that kind of musical prejudice. However, well before his time, indeed long before he was born, the best jazz players crossed the demarcation lines all the time playing in all three of the above mentioned situations. If a theatre orchestra required a jazz player of that kind he was recruited. hence Phil Seaman's long West-End run in the London production of 'West Side Story', which I admit though commonplace nowadays was a trifle unusual back then. Each town had a resident dance orchestra and it had it's share of jazz soloists, plus there were the famous touring name bands, most of whom were based in the capital city and they too contained several equally famous jazz improvisers. Indeed there were many big bands constantly touring the country, Ted Heath's being the truly sparkling aggregation at the top of every fan's list.

I have heard via several sources here in Sydney that it was the Australian band leader Graeme Bell who introduced traditional jazz into England, indeed Australians have actually approached me to ram this information down my throat but it simply isn't true, there were already several very famous established jazz bands there when he arrived in 1948. My old boss Nat Gonella always had a good band, even back in the thirties as did Harry Gold and Sid Phillips, Freddy Randell had a very fine postwar jazz band among other up and coming groups. plus Humphrey Lyttleton already had his New Orleans style band,

whom Graeme and his sidemen appeared alongside and eventually recorded with. Graeme Bell does not claim this distinction himself I may add, his claim is that, appalled by the undemonstrative sit down audiences, he encouraged England fans to get up and dance to his music which they did and that is in fact a far more accurate assertion.

The beboppers were well represented by people like Tito Burns, Ronnie Scott, Johnny Dankworth and Tony Kinsey, all these men had been involved with the big bands and now led their own small groups. Alan Clare, Johnny Rogers and Dennis Rose were already legends in their own lifetimes and were truly wonderful, all kinds of musicians went along to listen to Alan after they had finished playing at their own gigs. Tommy Whittle & Jimmy Skidmore were with the Dill Jones Trio at the Fifty One Club, all in all there was a very healthy jazz scene happening in Britain. I can't list all of the men involved on these pages, read Jim Goldbolt's volumes, 'The History Of Jazz In Britain from 1919 to 1950 (and onwards) if you want more information.

To a large extent my new friend Jimmy Edwards fell into the weddings, club and pub band category and although he confined his playing mostly to jazz bands he would take a dance hall gig if one came along. I had seen his name in press reviews of local jazz club performances from time to time so to my inexperienced and parochial young mind he was famous! As someone who was more than just keen on music I took an avid interest in the whole scene. I read every word printed in the entertainment pages of the Southern Daily Echo, the local newspaper and any reviews in any national newspaper I could lay my hands on. From the first day I discovered it's existence I bought and avidly read 'The Melody Maker', It became my bible. In those days it was a somewhat more esoteric organ than of late, aimed more at the musician than towards the layman. Naturally, in such a limited and esoteric field I became familiar with the names of the local 'stars' as well as the nationally famous and although I knew where all of them were playing on any given evening, I had never met one in person. I was under the age required to gain entrance to the places they played in, for Christ's sake! How the hell could a youngster get to see and listen to these marvellous players if he wasn't allowed into the clubs, pubs, or licensed dance halls where they played? It only added to my head banging frustration. Needless to say, I seized the first chance I could to go back into the store to talk to Jimmy Edwards, well to be honest, I didn't wait for an opportunity, I just marched back in there when I could bear the suspense no longer. Nobby fuckin' Church and Harry bleedin' Phillips could both go to hell, I had found myself a real live drummer!

When I marched up to the counter Jim looked up and said, "Don't stay out there for Christ's sake, lift the flap and come on through!" I opened the section of the counter he indicated, went through and walked over to his desk. "So, you're going to be a jazz drummer eh," he repeated, it was not a question. "do you know how to do a roll?" I stared at him. "I didn't know there was any special way?" I said. He produced a pair of drumsticks from his desk, "Do you know what a paradiddle is?" he asked. "Nope." I admitted, "I don't know anything, but I wanna learn as soon as I can!" "Well a roll is two beats with each hand like this," he tapped on the desk-top, right right, left left, right right, left left, "see?" he increased the speed until the sticks were a blur, he looked at my face and saw the fascination burning there. "A paradiddle is more fun though" he went on, "Look, it goes like this! Right left right right, Left right left left, Right left right right, Left right left left! See, it kinda mixes your hands up a bit." He laughed at the expression on my face now, I daresay my eyes were out like organ stops. "You try it." he said handing me the drumsticks. I did it without hesitation, not as fast as he did it but I had no trouble with the complicated handing. "Hmm," he mused, "That's not bad, most people cant do that straightaway, play something you know for me?"

For the first time in my life I was talking to a real drummer but I felt no shyness or embarrassment, I

simply did what I had always done right from early childhood, whenever playing at home alone, I pretended to be the drummer beating out the rhythm with the band on the radio and now I did it for him. I banged out all the copycat drum breaks I had stored away in my head for all of those frustrating years. He listened for a while then stopped me. "That's very good!" he said, "Considering you have not the faintest idea what you're doing you actually do it very well, you have an excellent conception." He sounded surprised. I had been found out of course, but I didn't mind, I was enthralled, fascinated, intrigued. More important than anything else I had been transported to another existence, I had finally slipped through the black hole of the existing world into my own real world, the world which my soul had inhabited since having my first lucid thought, Jimmy Edwards was preaching to the converted. No, that wasn't true either, conversion wasn't necessary, I had been a drummer all my life, since my conception in fact!

His next words brought me back to harsh reality, "I think you'd better go mush, before somebody comes looking for you. I don't wanna get the blame for leading you astray!" he laughed, "Thanks Jim," I said, "I s'pose your right, I'll come back though if you don't mind." he laughed even more, "You'll find that all drummers are ever ready to talk about drums and drumming, we're all mad mush, we're bloody fanatics!" I left him and went fearfully back to Nobby. He didn't even glance up from his work, he made no comment nor did he ask where I'd been. He was happily absorbed in his own real world, where trigonometry and Pi R squared meant more than crotchets and quavers, He was avidly developing his beloved cones and air conditioning ducts, oblivious to my existence, although worlds apart Nobby Church and I were two of a kind.

I was very happy too, finally at long last I had entered my own world! I had never been in any doubt about what I was going to do in life, it was fundamental to my existence, now it was simply a matter of convincing my parents to allow the changes to take place. I couldn't wait to get home, the rest of the day was spent wondering if I could slip away to the store for a chat with Jim, he was the flame and I was the moth. It was a sublime agony but I had to respect the man's position, I didn't want to get him into trouble of any kind.

I wasn't much help to Nobby either, on the odd occasion when he did need me I was in a dreamlike trance and once he was forced to snarl, "Oi you! Concentrate on what we are trying to do here for God's sake!" and he wasn't the snarly type, not even remotely snarly.

When I arrived home I brought the subject straight into focus. I told my parents that I had to be a drummer, nothing else would do and no matter what they wanted or hoped for, we had no choice, it was not open for discussion, that was the way it was going to be, they would have to let me tread the path my soul dictated. I was very eloquent and it was my father who dashed my hopes on the rocks of reality. "Let's get something straight here my son," He began, "you are going to have a proper job, all this bloody silly nonsense about being a musician is going to stop, do you hear me? You've got ideas above your station, we are working class people, I went to a lot of trouble to get you into the sheet metal department, not everybody gets the chance you have been given, so just do as you're told and get on with it. Your mother and I are sick and tired of hearing about drums, drums drums bloody drums, it's all you've ever talked about since the day you were born!"

"Well that should have told you something surely!" I expostulated. "Don't get bloody lippy with me my son! I am telling you you are going to have a proper trade, understand? We are not going to tolerate any more of this nonsense! I don't want to hear another bloody word on the subject! Is that clear?" Nothing could have been clearer, it was devastating news and I was traumatised by it, it was very important.

I was at the crossroads of my life, all this had come at a tumultuous time for me, indeed for all children of that age, it was always, and still is an extremely difficult period. It is the time when with the full

blast of puberty breathing hotly down your neck, curiosity settles into a steady torment of desire. A desire for something unknown, untried, untasted and the longer one remains a virgin the more intense becomes the longing, curiosity increases tenfold and becomes all pervasive. Coupled with this agonising conundrum and closely allied to it is the growing alienation with one's parents, especially the mother, they and she in particular are the source of all criticism and censure. Peer group pressure daily forces new obligations onto the young, they are pressured into wearing specific kinds of clothing, to have a bizarre hairstyle, a tattoo, wear an earring. indeed they have to wear rings in all kinds of odd places nowadays! Parents are the people who constantly reject all of these things, they veto them, try to ban them and unfortunately it is the parents who have all the money, so if you wish to wear the latest fashions you must first go to them to ask for it and they are the ones who say: "What? Wear a see through dress and have your head shaved? My God how dare you walk in here and ask for money for that my girl? If you ever come home looking like that, you can leave this house for ever!" Or it may be something like: "If you think I am going to let you spend my hard earned money on one of those bloody silly worn out looking leather jackets all your idiotic mates are lounging around in you can think again my son, and I'll tell you something else, I've seen those disgusting books you've been sneaking up to your room, don't think I don't know what you're up to up there!"

At this point the child, unable to tolerate any more of this garbage turns and walks out of the house, only to hear shouted after him: "And straighten your collar, don't pick your nose, mind how you cross the road and don't be late home, DO YOU HEAR ME!" It's hardly surprising that some of them run away, or top themselves, at the age of fifteen they don't want to hear any more garbage, enough is enough already! The Dutch in their wisdom actually have a stock phrase for this teenage syndrome:

'Te groot voor serviette, te klein voor tafellaken.'

Translated it means Neither napkin or tablecloth, they're too big to be one and not big enough to be the other.

The parents are trapped too of course, they cannot instantly break free from habits formed over many years. Years during which they sacrificed a great deal. With their passions running molten, at a time when they were more in love than at any other time in their relationship, they must relinquish the freedom of their erupting courtship with it's accompanying unbridled lovemaking and lose the most idyllic years of their lives. Such total freedom is forfeited when new born children impose a twenty four hour omnipresence into their lives. No longer is it possible to just walk out of the house and go somewhere nice together or to simply drop everything and make love spontaneously on the kitchen floor, all those things are gone.

Now with the kids grown up and they in their not so young middle years, they find themselves merely the loving parents of hostile strangers, enemies in their home, but still feeling the need to nurture and protect the children they love and gave up so much for. This is truly an extremely uncomfortable part of the parental condition and for the children too, because the parents they once relied upon as their support system have now become the enemy. It is high noon, the parents and their offspring are at the crossroads, staring belligerently at each other down the double barrel of life, the hammers are cocked, it is time for the children to leave, but where can they go? At such a tender age and with no skills, as yet they have no other means of support, outside pressures are converging on them and they need all the help they can get, but ironically their parents who by now should be in a position to help, are unable to recall their own teenage feelings. It is not is if it were an untasted experience, all this happens to each of when we are young, or most of us anyway and yet, when we have kids of our own, we turn hostile, just

as our own parents did. Why do adults forget? I know there are some exceptions, I've met all three of them!

So here I was, desperate to be free, caught fast in the vice of life. I attempted to sum up my situation as simply as possible.

I could see no light at the end of the tunnel, if I were to leave home I had nowhere to go and my folks would surely come after me, with the police giving assistance if necessary and even if I avoided capture, without a home, a job or any way of finding the money I would never get a drum kit! Obviously the project would have to be shelved for the time being, but time was of the essence and it was quickly running out. I was still not learning the skills I would need for my career. I had to make a change myself somehow, and soon! Help was never going to come from the home front, it was pointless wasting time and effort even thinking along those lines, my situation was going to necessitate a huge initiative on my part. I had to buy a drum kit and pay for lessons. I began perusing the situations vacant column in The local newspaper because the first move was going to be to get myself out of the shipyard into a job with more money.

I've mention from time to time throughout this book, that life is happening to us all at the same time, it doesn't occur in a nice safe chronological order, everything is occurring simultaneously. I'll explain; at the same time as this personal upheaval was happening, poliomyelitis hit the headlines. It was the equivalent of today's AIDS scourge except you didn't have to do anything wonderfully naughty to catch it. Polio simply struck you down by invading your body and you died! If you were unlucky enough not to die, you were left horribly crippled, or in some cases paralysed for life. The Iron Lung was invented specifically to cope with it's more unfortunate victims. It was sort of Hobson's choice without the choice.

I was terrified of catching it because in my view a jazz drummer with paralysis loses a certain amount of credibility! Plagues occur regularly throughout history, they are nature's culling process and are terrifying, Polio was no exception, people were dropping like flies all around me. The newspapers and radio newscasts were full of it and it went on for months. Every day we were exhorted by the media to be on the lookout for symptoms, a headache, stiff neck, pains in the limbs, backache, lethargy. Every morning I got out of bed with all of them, every single god-damned one! Add them to my hatred of the shipyard, a rampaging but still frustrated libido and the orchestra playing in my head, plus my parent's opposition to me heeding it's siren call, it is no wonder that I became an insomniac and that too was added to the formidable list of my private torments. It's no mystery to me why kids of that age top themselves. I harboured no desire to do any such thing, had I been nurturing thoughts of that nature I would have welcomed Poliomyelitis, or Infantile Paralysis as it was then known, a name that struck at the very core of my fear describing as it did a disease that specifically attacked and paralysed the young. Personally I wanted to live very much so every morning I rose from my bed suffering the imagined symptoms and mistook them for the real thing, it was a classic case of acute hypochondria and was added to the above list.

I was supremely unhappy, and miserably depressed, I could not have felt worse had I been one of the unfortunate gamins invented by Charles Dickens for the more depressing of his tales. I became intractable, I didn't care about anything, I simply wanted to remove myself from the grossly uncontrollable situation I was trapped in. In a perfect example of the quotation: 'In grave difficulties and with little hope, the boldest measures are the safest.' I took to calling Mister Bell Dinger, simply because he didn't want me to and I visited Jimmy Edwards to talk about drumming because I did want to, no matter what other people might want, including Jimmy. In truth I intended to milk his brain for as long as I had access to it and if it got him into trouble, that was his problem not mine. I wasn't lazy

where work was concerned, I did what I was asked to do but everyone knew I intended leaving, it was purely a matter of conjecture as to how long before I did so?

On top of all this my parents received a court order evicting them from the house in Luton Road. D' you remember that? We were living in a house owned by a man called Trehorne, a neon lighting engineer who, at the end of the war had been sent to Jersey to refit or replace the shop fascias and advertising signs lost or destroyed during the German occupation. Naturally, when his task was completed he had to return home, we had known that before he went, it was understood, part of the deal, nevertheless it came as a shock when his letter arrived requesting my parents to find somewhere else to live. With nowhere for them to go they were forced to ignore it and the law had to be set in motion once again and once again it was not personal attack, it was the only thing to do. Again my father went to the Housing Commission, this time he asked when could he expect the house in Spring Road to be rebuilt? "We can't say Mr Harrison, it is not possible to tell at this juncture. We are, as you know, trying to rebuild the city of Southampton as fast as we can, You don't need me to tell you that, nor what a mammoth task it is, we can only work our way through the work-lists and rebuild things as we come to them we shall of course rebuild your home as soon as we come to it. What more can I promise you?" there was no arguing with that, it was the obvious truth. Defeated for the umpteenth time Dad returned home and it was only a matter of days before a summons to appear in court was once again placed in his hands. He went to the hearing to be told yet again to find somewhere else to live or face eviction. No one was to blame for this parlous state of affairs, the courts were bursting at the seams with similar cases, people were queuing up to be evicted, as a matter of fact the Trehorne's were in exactly the same boat, they had nowhere to live until we had somewhere to live! Clutching the notice to quit in his hand Dad went back to the housing department to try to get something moving. The guy behind the counter made him an offer he was in no position to refuse, he told my father that he could let him have one of the new Canadian designed and manufactured prefabricated houses on a 'Prefab estate' in Mortimer Road, Woolston, on condition that Dad sign away all rights to the house in Spring Road. With nowhere else to go and no quick solution in sight, a totally unnecessary bargain was struck and my father signed the release. That crooked bureaucratic bastard whoever he was, should have been horsewhipped for that. The prefabs were a temporary address while the permanent residences were under re-construction, that was the original idea I am sure of that, he took advantage of my father's plight, I have no doubt at all that he was making a few extra quid out of some sort of scam, things like that don't happen unless there is money involved. From my mother's point of view life's big wheel had turned it's full ghastly circle, her return to Woolston, her nemesis, drove a stake through her heart. She hated everything about it. She hated the gray dormitory shipyard suburb and all it's grim memories, she hated the corrugated asbestos home on the grim corrugated asbestos housing estate and most of all she hated the orange box styled government subsidised furniture she was forced to furnish it with. It was called, 'Utility Furniture', well at least they'd got the name right! Compared with the beautiful stuff she'd lost this ugly utilitarian replacement crap was unthinkable and she became depressed. Medically depressed I mean, psychologically damaged. She'd always been unstable, probably from birth. Finding her mother dead on the floor of the bar didn't help matters, this was quickly followed by the loss of her hearing, later her inability to accept the death of her first child, a daughter and then seeing me at my birth, the ensuing battles with her elder sister, father and other brothers and sisters over my return, plus the need to keep it all from me, occasioned a deep seated guilt and further burdened her conscience finally contributing to her sinking into the abyss. In spite of it all, during the war years she had shown great courage, or at least a brave stoic forbearance. However the strain had been mounting, to offset her temporary unhappiness she had been looking forward to the day when she could move back into her proper home and now she

knew that was never going to happen. The lifestyle she had conceived, indeed the comfortable lifestyle she had achieved during the halcyon years preceding the war had now been destroyed for ever. The eventual complete loss of her home and its beautiful contents tipped her over the edge.

When she married my father she had become the wife of a merchant seaman and in a relatively short while he had become a member of the crew of The Queen Mary, the most prestigious ocean liner in the world. In her world all this was not to be sniffed at, the pleasant little council house may have been modest by some people's standards, but it was in an extremely agreeable position and she felt very comfortable in it. Once she had overcome her disappointment at my gender and had come to terms with that she became very happy. Taking a broad view, on the finely calibrated class ladder of the prevalent English way of viewing things she lived in a nice little home in an upper middle working class area and in a nutshell had achieved everything a woman with her background could have reasonably expected, life was good.

Five excessively stressful years later, she was now the wife and mother of two blue collar factory workers, living in a blue collar prefab estate several rungs down the social ladder, in working class terms, or in anybody's terms in fact. This was in a country where the class system was not just the rich and poor, not even the haves and have-nots, this was a country where if your husband was a tradesman and your neighbour's husband was an unskilled labourer you didn't sit next to each other on a bus. We are talking serious class distinction here, if you lived in a 'nice' street, you didn't mix with people from a less 'nice' street and you certainly weren't happy about having your children play with their children. In five tumultuous war years, through no fault of her own, my mother had slipped down the greasy pole of this particularly British insanity and became a war victim, not all the victims perished in the death camps you know and not all of the walking wounded were survivors of the front-line nor the concentration camps. I was approaching fifteen years of age and had long ago formed the view that my entire life was a bizarre nightmare and I intended removing myself from it A.S.A.F.P! My mother however could not conceive such a notion, she could see no way out of her predicament, she had been waiting impatiently for her world to return to normal and now she knew it was never going to happen, a broken doll she had been dumped into the wrong doll's house and abandoned there.

Actually the 'prefab' was a nice little place, it was state of the art and very well equipped, being young and insensitive, at least from her standpoint I declared it to be modern and thought it was very nice. It was centrally heated and had a built in Frigidaire for instance and we had never enjoyed such luxury before. I made fruit flavoured ice lollies which I thought was very cool,(and it was) but my mum was unable to be objective, she couldn't appreciate any of its good points and who can blame her? The central heating system was simple but effective, the closed in solid fuel stove in the lounge room was ducted to all the other rooms the heat of which could be regulated individually by adjusting a louvre above the door in each room. This was indeed very modern, however I was cognisant of the drop in status and also felt myself a victim of peer pressure, in the street I was privy to such xenophobic remarks as: "Don't you go near those children our Annie, they lives in them prefabs!" Apparently we were not like normal children, not like those who lived in real houses. It was a bit like being a gypsy: "Don't you go near them gippo's Harry, they lives in them caravans!" It was quite insane and the more I became enmeshed in it the more convinced I became that the human race *per se*, was a bunch of bloody idiots!

For instance I was working in a factory where men doing certain jobs wore different coloured overalls and it depended entirely on the colour of the overalls as to where they sat on the factory class ladder and more to the point, where they sat in the factory canteen at lunchtime. The two Ronnie's summed it up beautifully in their wonderful, "I look down on him because he looks up to me and I look up to him

because he looks down on me!” sketch. George Orwell on the other hand seemed under the impression that it only occurred in the catacombs beneath the hotels of Paris. Well I've got news for him, he obviously never worked in a British Naval Shipyard! I'll give you another instance, for some god forsaken reason the man who scrubbed the 'Staff Toilets' (make a note of the title) was considered a cut above the chap who cleaned the 'Workmen's Toilets'. I want to make a point here, I do not want you to think I am questioning the wisdom of separate toilets for blue and white collar workers. Not at all, I am questioning the status of the two cleaners involved, as far as I'm concerned they were both shit-house cleaners!

On the question of labelling the toilets separately, well that was something else again. It became somewhat tricky when calling the workmen's loo the 'Tradesmen's Toilet', as in the case of the 'Tradesman's Entrance' for instance because there was the possibility that unskilled men would then not be allowed to use it. Unskilled men were untrained and therefore did not have a trade, therefore and here lies the crux of the matter, they were not tradesmen you see.

Fitters and turners working to thousandths of an inch were the aristocracy of the shipbuilding industry, this entitled them to wear white overalls, though God knows why? They worked at the lathes and therefore got covered with black oil stains and slurry. Slurry is a mixture of oil and water used to cool and lubricate the cutting blade by the way. Carpenters, Joiners and Shipwrights wore tan or light brown overalls and all other tradesmen wore blue overalls, hence the term 'blue collar workers' of course. Even among these divisions there were divisions. If you were among the skilled group you wore a boiler suit, but if you were unskilled you wore a bib-and-brace.

However ironically, the cream of the crop that is to say the top skilled hands wore a bib-and-brace *plus* a matching jacket over the top of it. If all this all sounds inconsequential to you, well Gawd help the person who turned up for work wearing the wrong overalls, it was a case of: “Who the 'ell does 'e think 'e is then 'Arry? Walkin' around 'ere dressed like a skilled man? We'll 'ave to 'ave a word in 'is fuckin' ear-'ole I reckon!” and he was lucky if a word in his ear was all he got. I didn't belong here, I had to get away from this Bedlam somehow.

Then one day I saw it, the answer to one of my dreams. Like all fifteen year old boys and since my distant encounter with Bert Croucher, I had developed a passion for motorcycles. What fifteen year old boy doesn't? They are the ultimate thrill machines, well flying a jet fighter plane is the only way up I guess, no pun intended! I knew it would have been a pointless waste of breath asking my parents if I could have a motorcycle. Would you have bothered? You can't be serious, I was still not allowed to have an ordinary bicycle! However by this time I was avidly perusing the pages containing the 'Situations Vacant' columns in the local newspaper and there I saw it, an ad inserted by Britain's ace TT rider and Southampton's major motor cycle dealer, Alec Bennett:

Teenager wanted. Boy to work in the maintenance and repair shop with a view to serving an apprenticeship as a motor cycle mechanic.  
Apply for interview at etc.

I didn't hesitate but went after the coveted position poste *fuckin*-haste, as they would have said in the yard. I sailed through the interview, although with my jaundiced eye I had some reservations about the guy who interviewed me. Very tall, slim and slightly balding, he held his head on one side and leaned backwards as he spoke, a cigarette held curiously in his hand. Not held in the normal way, between the

first and second fingers with the palm turned towards him, but as though it were a theatrical prop between his forefinger and thumb, with the palm turned outwards his three remaining fingers splayed like an open fan. Peering down his nose at me, when he wasn't talking he drew smoke into his mouth then allowed it to drift slowly out, disappearing up his nostrils in a bifurcated unbroken stream. He managed to effect this without losing a single wisp and I was impressed "That's a neat trick!" I thought sardonically as I regarded his overt display of arrogance.

However, at the end of the interview he offered me the job, which I accepted ecstatically. I was also acutely nervous, the thought of arriving home with the news was daunting. I knew my parents wouldn't take it lying down and I was right, but I was also adamant, this was a serious situation, my future was at stake, my whole life in fact and I had to make some changes, this was the first and they were going to have to get used to it. My throat constricted at the thought.

Arriving home I walked into the kitchen and broke the news to them and somewhat truculently I must confess. The ensuing argument was heated, but I was expecting it, in no mood to be intimidated I was prepared for the predictable diatribe. "After all we've been through, I almost had to bribe Harry bloody Phillips to get you into the sheet metal shop!" said Dad, almost weeping with frustration. My mother interjected at this point, "So, it's Alec bloody Bennett's is it? Well I hope you don't think this is going to entitle you to a motorcycle 'cos you're not having one! Not as long as I've got breath in my body!" she spat at me, "I'm not old enough to ride one, never mind own one!" I replied, "I'll think about that when I'm sixteen, but right now I'd settle for a bicycle, I need a bicycle, I can't go anywhere! I can't even afford the bus fare to visit my friends!" "You don't need a bicycle," argued my father, deciding to put his foot down, "you'll hafta make friends with the young people who live around here 'cos I am not having any of this bloody nonsense, you stay in the job I worked so bloody hard to get for you, it's only five minutes down the road, you can walk to work!" I raised my eyebrows to the heavens, "I don't think you remotely understand the kind of situation you have on your hands, Dad," I said, "I can't seem to get it into your head. Listen carefully, the job in the shipyard is not for me, it never was and never will be. It's over, finished, f-i-n-i-s-h-e-d, fi-nished! Okay! I'm not going back! Try to understand that!" "Don't you bloody well take that tone with me my son," he blustered, "How dare you? I'll put the back of my hand across your mouth! I'll bloody smash you to pulp. I'll..." "Jesus Christ, Dad!" I interrupted, "Whoa! Blustering ain't gonna help! On Monday morning two weeks from now, you are going to walk to work by yourself because I'll be on a bus heading for Portswood. Okay? Nothing you can say or do is going to change that. We have reached that time in life when you'll go your way and I'll go mine!" At this point, my mother, who had been reading our lips, looking for all the world like a tennis fan at Wimbledon, stepped between us, "I think he means it, Bert!" she said, "I don't think there's anything we can do to stop him!" It was not the last time she would take my side on an important issue. Pulling him away, she led him into the lounge room and nursed his wounds.

I was left alone, I felt no elation, only sadness. I would rather not have fought with him over it, I liked him very much! I didn't like my mother at all yet it was she who had come to my aid. I was confused, my emotions were kaleidoscoping in my brain turning the inside of my skull into a psychedelic planetarium.

One thing about the change which even they could find no fault with, was the huge increase in my wages. Alec Bennett was a lot more generous with money than Sir John I Thornycroft and as they were still struggling to put their home together, the extra money was welcome. At J.I.T's I was earning nineteen and sixpence a week. Two shillings and sixpence of which I was allowed to keep and the rest went towards furniture and other household necessities. The incendiary bombs had left nothing in their wake, not even a teaspoon, so it wasn't easy and I was aware of that. As a matter of fact I didn't grudge

them a solitary penny, money was never even a small part of my predicament. It was time to go my own way, plough my own furrow, that was all. A small step for mankind but a giant step for me, I'd executed the first career move of my own volition.

I went to work the following morning and of course Dinger Bell asked why I'd been absent I cannot express the enormous satisfaction it gave me to reveal I'd been for an interview and had been accepted for another job. I issued him with the obligatory two weeks notice and after that there was little point in him remonstrating with me further. I walked away knowing my leaving would cause not a ripple on the waters of the sheet-metal world.

Jimmy Edwards was saddened by the news and from that point of view, so was I. We shared a common love, in fact he'd been a source of considerable information during the twelve months I'd spent with him and had altered my entire thinking. From a musical standpoint he'd focused my muse into areas I'd hitherto been unaware of. For a start I'd no idea drumming was written down on paper like other music. Along with the common herd, I thought drummers banged away, making it all up as they went along and it was Jimmy who destroyed the myth. From the very first day in the store, which I already described, plus many subsequent days from then on, he had encouraged me telling me many helpful things and in that respect influenced my future. He made me aware of things I knew nothing about, things I never even knew existed. He began my musical education and not just by showing me the paradiddle, but by talking to me about music as a whole. When I went back to him after our first encounter I remember him asking what sort of music I preferred? I said I liked all of it. Then he asked me what kind of music I wanted to play when I actually became a drummer? "Jazz!" I replied and saw his eyes light up. "Do you have any jazz records?" he asked. "No," I said, "I just listen to the radio!" "Who do you like best?" he asked. I named Sydney Bechet, The Benny Goodman Orchestra with Gene Krupa on drums, Harry James, Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey and several other American juggernauts, plus the current English bands I also favoured, Sid Phillips, Freddy Randell, Humphrey Lyttleton and of course the great Nat Gonella. "Before the war," I explained, "my dad used to bring home recordings from New York, people like Bix Beiderbecke, Jack Teagarden, Paul Whitman, Bing Crosby and The Rhythm Boys. I liked them all. But the records were destroyed in the blitz." I added ruefully. He nodded sympathetically, "D'you dig Bird?" He asked enigmatically, "What?" I said, digging birds sounded cruel, "What has that to do with anything?" I wondered. "Bird man! Haven't you ever heard of Bird, Charlie Parker?" he sounded incredulous, as if I had just committed heresy. I was forced to admit I hadn't. "Well this afternoon, during your lunch-break," he said, "walk along to Spikin's music shop and listen to Bird, okay? then come back and tell me what you think, Max Roach is a drummer you should be listening to man!" At this point he picked up his drumsticks and with the one in his right hand began playing the ding ding-a-ding ding-a-ding rhythm on a small brass plate that was sitting on his desktop, at the same time he tapped out several totally different patterns on the desk lid with the one held in his left. I could not believe what I was seeing, it was as if each hand was being operated by two separate people. I was immobilised by the mere concept of this I had never thought along those lines at all, it set me another challenge and directed me along another path.

In my lunch break I went along to the music shop and did as I was bid. It's interesting to recall here that although I professed to like all music, it's also true to admit that in common with millions of other people, then and now, when modern jazz came on the radio I turned it off. It seemed too erratic to me, it was as though the players were running their fingers over the keys with complete disregard for any discipline whatsoever, In my humble opinion they were like a group of chimpanzees banging away on typewriters. However, now, standing in a soundproof booth, as I listened to Charlie Parker I'd been forewarned and forearmed, listened with undivided attention.

At the first the music still sounded like the jumbled noise that I had always heard, but I had been taught a few special things to listen for, so this time I persevered, when it was over I replaced the pick-up arm at the beginning of the record and listened to it again, and again and again. Naturally I was listening mainly to the drummer and suddenly it all made perfect sense, time was what they were playing with, I mean all of them, time was the name of the game. Of course there were wonderful harmonic things happening too and the tunes were familiar and recognisable, although played quite differently from how I was accustomed to hearing them, it was very refreshing and I was amused, but the real game, the African influence on the game was time and a very complicated division of it. In essence, the metre was a straight four beats to the bar, which the bass player maintained with metronomic precision, the drummer also maintained this four-four feel but at the same time he built a 12/8 rhythmic framework of immense complexity around it which the other musicians were using. They were building on it, playing with it and in some instances in counterpoint to it, but always paying close attention to it, they never ever lost contact with it.

The magical rhythmic ingredient however, was that every bar of the music was sub-divided by twelve, or six, or groups of three superimposed against the count of four and although nobody ever seemed to be playing twelve, they were all thinking in twelve. I was astonished! I began to notice that no matter what wild musical leaps the remarkably daring saxophone player took, the drummer was always there with him, supporting him, dotting his I's and crossing his T's, inserting commas and full stops, literally punctuating the man's music, while at the same time he was keeping metronomic time. These men's reflexes alone were mind boggling. Soaring over and above all of this, revealed to me for the first time, was Bird, the astonishing bird in full flight, Charlie Parker! It was Yehudi Menuhin who after playing with Stephane Grappelli and the British jazz trio that accompanied them said: "It is amazing, a group of Jazz musicians are like a team of skilled jugglers, they play keeping dozens of notes in the air at the same time and they never drop one!" It was a very astute comment. The musicians that I was listening to for the very first time seemed able to read each others minds and although it was an improvised performance, it was also a highly disciplined competition, in which they cut each other to ribbons while simultaneously supporting each other. I thought of it as a flock of birds fluttering around the branches of a musical tree, not one of them ever missed a footing nor collided with another bird, nor flew into a branch, nor even brushed against a single twig, the bass player and drummer between them formed the trunk, the chords were the branches and the beautiful improvisations were the leaves.

I went back to the factory a changed man, now I needed a drum kit more than ever. I wanted to learn how to do these miraculous things, I was intrigued by the twelve, twenty four, thirty six, forty eight division of the bars and I desperately wanted to start working on it, I knew I could do it, I had seen Jimmy Edwards do some of it and he was a bloody sheet metal worker, a part time drummer for Christ's sake! I was now totally preoccupied with the enormous problem. There was no point in mentioning it at home, I was not yet fifteen years old, I had no money and no credit rating, what was I going to do? Life had to continue and I would have to wait a little longer but something had to be done, I would have to do it myself but could see no way forward.

Having given Dinger Bell my notice and taken the first giant step into the future, leaving my friend and mentor Jimmy Edwards was the biggest wrench. Ironically he was to some extent partly to blame, he was one of the reasons I was leaving. That is to say he was the catalyst, I would have gone anyway but Jim had crystallised my resolve and now, after twelve months of misery, with his help and advice I had made the move.

I arrived at his workbench and said goodbye, but he grinned, "This ain't goodbye nipper, we'll be seeing a lot of each other, you'll see. For instance, do you know that the Southampton Rhythm Club operates at

The Cliff Hotel just around the corner from here?” I confirmed that I did know, but reminded him I was as yet too young to be admitted into licensed premises. “Ah! Right mush. Course you are! I’ll hafta think about that one, there must be a way round it.” he mused, grinning wolfishly. I shook his hand and left and in spite of our parting felt invigorated by his optimism.