

Chapter 2 - Teen Age

(1958 to 1965)

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(3rd October 2012 – Penang)

Grammar School

Darwen Grammar School (DGS) was a whole different ball game when compared to St. John's Primary School, more classmates, more subjects, more teachers, more space, more everything in fact. The first three years at DGS were OK, I suppose. I learnt that if you opted to play chess during lunch hour there was a warm, dry classroom set up for chess players. Much more preferable to walking around a cold, windy playground, or muddy playing field.



Cello player: bottom left.

In the changing rooms after football I learned that other boys wore underpants whereas I wore shirts with a long flap at the back which you could pull through between your legs as you pulled up your trousers, instant underpants. All the other lads fell about in hysterics at my make do underwear as we were changing from our football kit in the changing room. Needless to say, I was mortified. Dad wore the same sort of long flapped shirts and he used to sleep in it, didn't take it off for days. Mum to the rescue again with new underwear before the next games lesson. I learnt to play the cello, mainly because I was sweet on the cello teacher and as it was to turn out, I was the only lad who stayed with the program and became the only boy in the school orchestra for a while. I played in the orchestra right the

way through to the end of the upper sixth, once a week at morning assembly, sometimes very out of tune.



Class A4, 4488 - Union of South Africa, a Gresley design used on the LNER

This was the time for making friends. Chas (Roy Chadwick), Stan (Stanley Hurne) and Fats (Michael Hughes) became good mates. I played chess with Stan during school lunch times practically every day and I always lost!! Chas's Dad worked on the railways as a freight train guard and it was Chas who introduced us to train spotting. Train spotting is a bit of a misnomer really, we were spotting locomotives, as opposed to the train which is the string

of carriages or trucks the engine is pulling. Nit picking, I know, but still, must be accurate!! The majority of the locomotives back then were steam engines. 'Spotting' an engine meant having seen its number or name and ticking it off in a book of numbers published by Allen. I wonder if they still print such books? Sounds a bit of a weird thing to get hooked on but there was a lot of interesting technical things associated with the hobby, the design of the locomotives for one thing. Each railway region in the country had its own distinctive design of engines and very rarely did they move away from their home region. Designers such as Stanier and Gresley designed engines that travelled the routes from London to Glasgow and London to Edinburgh respectively. There were also different designs of engines for different types of trains: long distance passenger express trains needed different engines to heavy overnight goods trains. And how do steam engines work? All this was interesting stuff for me which no doubt set me on course to becoming a mechanical engineer.

And then there was the travelling to get to the different railway regions. The four of us would take the train on Saturdays from Darwen to either Shrewsbury, Doncaster, York, Chester, Leeds, Huddersfield and one-time even London. Our nearest place to spot engines of any worth was Leyland, where we could spot the LMS, (London Midland Scotland) expresses between London and Glasgow, the Coronation Class engines being the prize spots here. The object was to tick off all the engines in that class, but I don't think I ever achieved that.

The London trip was an over-nighter. We were only 13 years old and our parents let the four of us travel unaccompanied to London, which took 8 hours by the overnight train from Manchester's London Road Station as it was called then, arriving in London around 6 am. I was the only one who had been to London before and then only with my Dad for a day's visit to the Machine Tool Fair held annually at the Olympia Exhibition Hall. We arrived in London green to big cities with no backup mobile phone or internet, we didn't even have a land line phone at home to ring in case of any emergency. We spent the day on the Southern Region, spotting trains out of Waterloo Station and in the evening, we took the train from Euston back to Manchester and then on to Darwen, arriving back in the town on the last train of the day. All great fun. Such freedom!!!!

Model railways also became a hobby. Dad built Mark and me a large wooden table with a hole in the centre in which you could stand, the trains running all around us. In the end, Mark and I had quite a complex track layout with overhead electric model engines as well as the standard steam engines. Stan had a passion for model plane making. And he showed me the techniques for making planes from balsa wood and tissue paper. There were plenty of open spaces around Darwen to go fly the finished models. Mine were plain gliders but Stanley built planes with engines that whirred around you in circles, controlled by a couple of wire tethers. Pretty hairy really. Bird watching also became a passion. Long walks on the moors with binoculars. We had no television or internet, you see, so we were thrown back

on your own resources to keep yourself entertained, as Mum always used to say, "If you are bored, it is your own fault."

(16th October 2012 – Penang)

Holidays and the Wolseley

Our holiday destinations at this time changed too. Mum decided that Cornwall and Devon were getting too touristy and that Scotland was the new frontier. Dad had bought our first car around the time I started at the Grammar School from a guy up the road, a 1947 Wolseley, EN7550 the number plate. This made a holiday to Scotland not only possible but much more interesting as it would also be great for getting around when we arrived at the holiday town. The first Scottish trip was to the coast, east of Inverness, somewhere near Louissemouth, perhaps Portsoy, I am not exactly sure where we stayed.

The old Wolseley was a big, heavy car without much power under the bonnet. For a two-week holiday Mum went a little crazy with stuff to take, we seemed to be packing everything, including the kitchen sink. We set off on a Friday night, heading north up the A6. With no motorway to ease the journey, the M6 hadn't been built yet, Dad planned driving through the night to reach Glasgow in the early hours of Saturday morning to get through the city before the morning rush hour. We had heard about Shap but didn't really anticipate that it would provide a bigger challenge for the poor old Wolseley than any Scottish mountain. The Shap climb on the A6 is steep, very steep, bottom gear all the way. And then a snapping noise. What the heck was that? Only a broken rear spring. Dad being Dad, he had brought 'stuff' just 'in case' and he was able to do a temporary fix before we set off again, no turning back even if we were only 70 miles from home but 300 miles from

Inverness. Turning back would mean admitting defeat. No way!!! Of course, the delay had us passing through Glasgow in the early morning. Not good, but once through, we stopped by the roadside and Dad had a quick nap. Mark and I went train spotting on the line by the road.

Once we had reached Portsoy, Dad contacted a friend who ran the scrap yard that Dad used to get spares from to keep the old Wolseley on the road and he arranged for a new spring to be trained up to our holiday town. Amazingly it arrived in time to be fitted and we left for home on the planned return date. This



Dad with the 1947 Wolseley.

was the holiday Mum got sun stoke and I fell down a cliff and gashed my thigh. I still have the scar from that little tumble.

We spent the next four summer holidays in Scotland going to Mallaig and then Ullapool in the Highlands followed by visits to the Orkney Islands and the Shetland Islands, always travelling in the old Wolseley. For the Orkney trip we drove to Thurso and took the ferry across to Stromness. Thankfully the crossing for us was relatively calm. It can be very, very rough with the waters from the Atlantic surging through a small strait into the North Sea



Loading the Wolseley. No Ro-Ro ferries this far north.

and back again on the turn of the tide. But we had it more or less flat calm, thankfully. Orkney was the place that first ignited my interest in the past. We visited Skara Brae, a Neolithic stone-built settlement, located in the Bay of Skailon on the west coast of the main Orkney island. Consisting of ten clustered houses, it was occupied from roughly 3180 to 2500 BC and is Europe's most complete Neolithic village. I found the idea that dwellings 5000 years ago had features you could recognise in a

modern-day house, quite extraordinary. There were beds, a sideboard, and a hearth for a cooking fire. The house was built of local stone, as was the furniture which included cupboards, dressers, seats, and storage boxes. Each dwelling was entered through a low doorway that had a stone slab door that could be closed "by a bar that slid in bar-holes cut in the stone door jambs". A sophisticated drainage system was even incorporated into the village's design, one that included a primitive form of flushed toilet in each dwelling. All pretty amazing, since this is 3000 years before the Romans started strutting their stuff, for goodness sake. This place was lived in at the time of the pyramid builders in Egypt. I tell you, the idea that these guys had this level of sophisticated living at the edge of Europe 5000 years ago, just blew my mind. At the time I didn't realize that you could become an archaeologist, never even having heard the term archaeology. Darwen was a very insular place, giving a young lad a very restricted view of life's possibilities. If I had known back then about a possible career path through antiquity, my life would have taken quite a different turn, I am sure.

(5th November 2012 – Penang)

Early Ambitions

My big teen ambition was to join the Royal Navy (RN). With all the heroic war films Mum had taken me to see in my early days, the impression of a Royal Navy warship as a well-

organized, tightly run unit was well entrenched. The idea of a fighting ship as an independent, self-sustaining community of individuals was very appealing to me at the time, although now I have no idea why. Perhaps it was all the glory associated with the Senior Service that the British made films portrayed, not showing battles Britain had lost or the total horror of war.

A visit to the HMS Vanguard really clinched it for me. Vanguard was the last battleship built for the Royal Navy. She never saw action, being only completed after the end of the Second World War and in fact she was only in service for 14 years, being commissioned in the year of my birth, 1946, and decommissioned in 1960. By then Battleships had become obsolete, one well aimed missile or bomb could sink them. When we were on holiday in Cornwall or Devon HMS Vanguard happened to pay a visit to the place we were staying and allowed visitors on board for an open day. The picture shows the ship exactly as I saw her, anchored off the coast. Magnificent.



My initial ambition was very modest, to join the RN as an engineering artificer and work in the engine room. I read everything I could get my hands on about the RN, its admirals, history, battles etc. My next ambition was a step up to becoming an engineering officer and finally I aimed at joining the Royal Corp of Naval Constructors (RCNC). These were the guys who design the fighting ships. The plan was to join RN after doing my 'A' levels, first as an undergrad engineering student to get a B.Sc., followed by a Masters in naval architecture with the RN paying me a salary and the tuition fees for the four years of study. Sounded like a real good deal to me, getting a salary whilst being a student.

But all the best laid plans of mice and men, etc. The first set back was sort of an own goal when the Grammar School didn't support the application I made to join the RCNC when I was in the sixth form. The teachers didn't think I was capable of achieving the high grades the RCNC required to join their training program. So, my application was rejected. Bummer. As things turned out, I did better than the grades required and years later one of the teachers apologised to me for not supporting my application when it crossed his desk. Such is life.

But I hadn't given up the ambition after this initial set back. In the final year of my time at Birmingham University, I applied to the RCNC again. This time there was a full interview board at their headquarters in Bath, very intimidating with a full day of assessments. And wonder of wonders, they offered me a place on the naval architecture Masters on condition

I made a 2.1 on the B.Sc. I was made up. But again thwarted!! On the day I made a 2.2. Rejected. What made it worse was knowing that a few grade points more would have seen me there. On the graduation list, my name was at the head of the 2.2 list. Depressing or what?

If the RCNC didn't want me then perhaps the education/training side of the RN might. After graduating I applied to the RN as an instructor. The interview was held at the Admiralty Building in Whitehall, London and in those days, when security was non-existent, you could just walk into the Admiralty Building without anyone questioning you or doing a body search. Free and easy. The interview appointment letter simply gave a room number in the building and expected you to find it unaccompanied. But again, a no go. The interview board considered me too meek and mild to cope with the 'rough' ratings that would make up the training classes.

Sometimes you just can't win. Pink Floyd song. Sometimes it is better to withdraw and regroup. The Royal Navy wasn't going to be my career path. After 10 years of dreaming, time to wake up and move on.

(11th November 2012 – Penang)

Girls

Patricia Ainsworth sat in the desk in front of mine in Form 3A. Pat was very pretty with waist length, blond hair. She wore her hair loose and inevitably some of the golden strands ended up on my desktop. The associated banter returning the lost golden strands led to a summer romance, well if you can call it a romance, going together to a couple of church dances and a walk in the local park. There was a gang of us knocked about at school break times and lunch hours during that summer term. We sat on the grass banking that ran along the back of the school's playing field. Pat played violin in the school orchestra giving us a shared interest. Her house was on the hill overlooking Darwen, in the posh end of the town, all doctors and solicitor's homes, all very traditional middle class. During the school summer break, we arranged to meet at a gate into Sunnyhurst Woods just behind her house. Well over an hour I waited at the gate before Pat arrived. She couldn't really tell her folks that she was going out to meet a boy for a walk in the woods, now could she? To get away from the house Pat made the excuse that the dog needed a walk, and so he did, walk with me. Pat's dog was of the lassie breed and very well behaved, as was I. I must confess that I was made up that she had even remembered our date never mind that she had lied to her parents to meet me that day.

But after the summer holiday, all the attachments of the previous term in our gang seemed to breakup including mine and Pat's. I was still an extremely bashful young lad and without the assurance of a group I was completely unable to approach Pat on my own, terrible I know but for whatever reason, Pat didn't approach me either. It didn't help that we were in

different streams going into Form 4 and so there it ended, in limbo, an enduring regret that I hadn't the guts to keep the friendship going.

The classroom seemed to be the only place for me to meet members of the opposite sex. I had known Jenifer Mottershead vaguely since first coming to the Grammar School in 1958 but it wasn't until the Lower Sixth that she 'picked me up'. Jenny had always been the chemistry teacher's pet, thoroughly disagreeable man called Scot who was also the deputy head of the school. For some unknown reason, the school allowed just the two of us to take further mathematics at 'A' level. A class of only two, with three teachers was a privileged not shared by many in a state school, a student-staff ratio of 2 to 3. The previous attempts by students to pass 'A' level further maths had met with failure but the powers that be must have thought we two had a chance of breaking this duck.

I still don't know how it happened, but I asked Jenny to a dance. She had been hinting that she would like me to take her to her Dad's church Saturday night dance in Edgerton, 5 miles south of Darwen. Jenny's Dad was a church warden at the parish church in the village and was responsible for organizing dances for the youngsters, bazaars, and that sort of thing. Years later Jenny confided that she had used all the tricks in the book to get me to talk to her. Only two of us in the class and she still had to resort to accidentally-on-purpose knocking her pencil case off the desk to get me to help her pick up the spilled pencils and pens. What was I like? Completely in awe of girls, that's what I was like. Dumb struck in their presence. A complete dork.

But how could I go to a dance if I had nothing to wear? Really, I only had my school uniform. Nothing else. At weekends and holidays, I wore the same shirts, trousers, and jumpers although with a different sports jacket. Zero wardrobe. Suits were the smart dress of the day and Mum agreed to buy me a tailored outfit from Burtons in the town. Would the suit be ready in time? I was on tender hooks. I wasn't going to ask Jenny to the dance without a suit to wear. Two days before the big day the suit was ready to collect and with screwed up courage, I asked Jenny to the dance in the corridor after a physics lab on the Thursday afternoon. She said yes. Jenny is your Grandma. From that day on we saw each other almost every day for the next 42 years until Jenny passed away in December 2005. But I am getting ahead of myself.

(12th November 2012, morning – Penang)

First Taste of Independence

In the summer of 1960, I made my first ever trip out of the UK, to Grevenmacher, Luxembourg. Least ways, that is where I am pretty certain the school trip went. I have had to research the actual name of the place based on four remembered facts:

1. A roman ruin,
2. A hotel by a large river.

3. A bridge over which was Germany
4. We had a day in a local winery, where the wine was stored in caves by the river.

Using Google map and Wikipedia it could only be Grevenmacher, on the river Moselle. Lucky for me there are not many river borders in Western Europe with Germany and very few bridges between the two bordering countries. For most of us on the trip, it was the first time away without our parents for any length of time, never mind to a different country and I must confess we made the most of it. The teachers didn't seem to mind us going off to the local bar for an evening, no doubt they were knocking back a few glasses of the local wine



themselves, probably Barnard Massard Moselle, in another bar nearby. I had my first puff of a cigarette in one of those bars. Made me very sick!!! The next day we were scheduled to visit Trier and the Roman ruins. I cried off ill until the teacher nominated to stay behind with me upbraided me for spoiling her day, making me feel very guilty. But she was right, of course, and I dutifully boarded the coach.

Gearing Up for 'O' Levels

The three-year dwell time after the dreaded 11 plus was now over. The next two years of Forms 4 and 5 were dedicated to another watershed set of exams, the 'O' levels. I, of course, opted for the science and mathematics stream which led to me taking 7 'O' levels, all science based save for French and English which you needed to pass to get a university place after 'A' levels. So, heads down and work. No time for a social life. Time went by in a blur. Definitely no girlfriends, too much of a distraction.

The school allowed students whom they considered good candidates for a pass to sit the 'O' level mathematics exam a year early, at the end of Form 4, it being seen as 'good practice' for the six more subjects to follow. When I passed the math, Mum took me to a book shop in Bolton and said I could buy any book in the shop. I chose a book on ancient travel stories, illustrated with wonderful looking coloured world maps. Mum expressed surprise and tried to make me change it for another more conventional tome, but no, this was the one I wished to have. Portent of things to come, I guess. My normal reading material, apart from books on the Royal Navy, was on physics and the biographies of famous scientists, all books borrowed from Darwen Library. Riveting reads. But particle physics really did intrigue me a

lot as did stories of the people who did the research and proposed the theories on the origins of the universe and everything.

The school held mock 'O' level exams just before Christmas in Form 5, ahead of the 'real' exams in May and June. I failed French in the mocks and barely scraped a pass in English. University entrance requirements needed a foreign language pass at 'O' level to even put in an application for a course and Mum, now being determined that I was going to university, set up another correspondence course for me, this time a crash revision in French. Again, weekly lessons and tests arrived by post, dutifully completed, and returned to the distant tutor. Returned scripts were again covered in red ink.

In the event, I gained 5 of the 6 'O' Level exams taken that summer, only bombing out on English Literature. No surprise there but French was a complete shock. On the day we went to the school to get the results, myself, and Jim Bennetts, who also had a little trouble with French, arrived together to be accosted by Miss Pierce, our French teacher. She came bounding down the corridor towards us beaming the widest of smiles, saying she could not wait to tell us we had both passed the dreaded 'O' level French. I had never seen Miss Pierce so animated before which just added to the surprise of the pass. Bless her. All her extra French language classes after school had paid off. I swear she was more chuffed than we were. The rest of the 'get your results session' was a bit of an anti-climax after the corridor incident.

English, or any language come to that, was always going to be a challenge. And as for literature! The Shakespeare play we studied for the literature exam was Mid-summer's Night's Dream, which to my mind was 'Much Ado about Nothing' which I felt summed up my own view of literature at the time. No science to it, therefore of no sense. The play was being staged in the Manchester Library Theatre during the time we were 'studying' it, probably because it was the play of the year for the 'O' levels. The school arranged a trip for the whole class to watch a matinee performance. I found the two hours completely meaningless, not to say completely infantile. What were these grown-ups doing prancing about on a stage talking in an unintelligible tongue dressed up as fairies and animals? I was relieved to be out of there at the final curtain and back on the bus home.

(12th November 2012, late afternoon – Penang)

Sixth Form and Romance

The lower sixth year at DGS proved to be quite an eventful time for me. From Saturday the 23rd November 1963 I dated my first and last real girlfriend, Jennifer. How could I know the exact date? Friday night, the 22nd, we had been to Blackburn Philosophical Society (BPS) for a talk on I-cannot-remember-what with a group of other sixth formers from DGS. We were encouraged by the staff at the Grammar School to broaden our horizons or some such thing

by going along to the BPS talks. All very interesting I have to say. Talks on all sorts of topics across the sciences.

On Friday the 22nd of November 1963, the then President of the USA, John Kennedy, was assassinated in Dallas. After seeing Jenny safely off home on the late-night bus, I got home to the news on the radio, and then all radio and TV transmissions were blacked out. The Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 was still fresh in everybody's minds. This was the time Russia and the US came the nearest to destroying the planet in a rain of nuclear war heads. Kennedy's assassination caused the American and the British to suspect the hand of the Kremlin in his murder with the next step in the Soviets fiendish plan being to launch of a surprise missile attack on major US and British cities. Serious stuff. It only needed one trigger happy soldier to press a button and there would have been an unstoppable holocaust, MAD, the acronym for Mutually Assured Destruction would follow. In the event the Russians very quickly dispelled any fears of a dastardly plan to annihilate half the world's population and after a couple of hours the radio came back on, full of the unbelievable news of Kennedy's death. But in any case, few people slept easy in their beds that night.

I must be on a roll today with two writing sessions. I usually manage 600 to 800 words in an hour after which my brain fuses and I have to stop tapping the keyboard. In the early days in Singapore, 1983, I started a similar diary but on paper and only for a couple of months. Then I was writing for Anna and Polly, for them to remember our time together on the island. I still have the diary somewhere in the loft at 4 Penylan, our bungalow in Wales. If I manage to retrieve it someday, then perhaps I will digitize it to insert into the 'stories' at an appropriate juncture.

Today has been a typical day in Penang for us. Up at 8:30, breakfast followed by the ironing and dry moping the apartment floor. Gek disappeared to her studio, which is only two doors away from where we are living, to paint and in the morning, I wrote the text above. 11:30 we left the apartment to take the bus and have lunch at Bukit Jambul, only three bus stops away from our apartment. There is a great little coffee shop at B J doing mixed rice etc., rice with your own choice of veggie and meats. Very delicious and only £1 each per plate full, a sort of a budget buffet. After lunch, we strolled up to the PBA Office to pay our utility bill and then on the way back to the B J shopping mall, called in at the Chinese biscuit shop for Chinese snacks. All fresh and yummy. Next on to Mydin the mega store in the mall. Today is the eve of Deipavali making the food section of the store unusually busy for a Thursday afternoon. Shopping done for the weekend, we bussed ourselves back home and after a quiet time on the sofa with a cup of coffee, we walked to Gek's studio. Gek is working on her new canvases, a group portrait of her brother Harry and his family, and I am preparing materials for the doll houses I am making at the moment.

Saturday night Jenny and I went on our date to her father's church dance, the start of a new romance. This was our first real date as I don't count the night before, that outing being an extension of classroom work really. The first date and I met Jenny's parents. Lord knows what they made of me, skinny and dressed in an obviously brand-new grey suit. I still don't know if I was the first boy Jenny had brought 'home' to meet the folks, but in any case, they didn't seem to mind me, all smiles and reassuring as they were. After a little rock and roll, Jenny suggested we take a little walk into one of the adjacent classrooms where she promptly kissed me full on the mouth!!! But your Mum and Dad are just next door, and this is our first date, I was thinking. Yesterday we were practically strangers in math class together and now we are snogging in close proximity to your parents. We didn't 'disappear' for long from the dance floor, so as not to raise any suspicions about where we were or what we were up to. I had visions of me being ejected from the dance by Mr. Motterhead's right boot, never to darken his door again. And I was perfectly innocent. But I doubt he would have believed his only daughter could be so forward. In truth, neither could I.

So started a four-decade partnership. Up to now these pages have been about me, me, and me. From now on there is a an-other, Jennifer, your Grandma.

(13th November 2012 – Penang)

Jenny and I studied for the same 'A' levels: Mathematics, Further Mathematics and Physics. We attended the same classes every school day but only sat together in the Mr. Ray's further mathematics class. No choice in Ray's class as it would have looked a bit odd, the two of us sitting on different rows in an otherwise empty classroom. There were only two other girls taking the mathematics and physics and for those classes Jenny would sit with them, as a way of showing solidarity with her own sex. After the first date at the church dance, we settled into a routine that lasted for the next two years. We would meet sometimes at break times at school but not every day as Jenny had a close friend, Susan Hewell. Susan was a musician, playing the piano and viola in the school orchestra. Jenny had tried to learn the violin earlier on in the lower forms, but it turns out she was tone deaf, not good for a string player. Jenny's Dad had been a fiddle player in a dance band before the war but clearly Jenny hadn't inherited his fiddling talent. Jenny spent lunch times mainly with Susan, the two of them were inseparable.

Unlike the rest of our peers who were in and out of relationships like revolving doors, for some reason it never crossed my mind that ours was a flash in the pan romance. Very naive was I. The amount of time we spent in each other's company, you might have expected it to generate at least one disagreement or worse, but nothing. At the weekends we would meet up on Saturday in the early evening and go to the cinema or the Nevada Dance Hall in Bolton town centre.

1963 was the year that Britain shook off the grey of the post war 1950s. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones took over from the Elvis Presley and all-American rock music, Bill Halley and his Comets et al. To say The Beatles and Stones were a breath of fresh air in the stale atmosphere of a drab and murky England is a gross understatement. After the near annihilation of the human race by the crazy Americans and equally nutty Russians in 1962 followed by the assassination of a populist US president just twelve months later, we felt like, 'Holly shit man, we had better enjoy before some idiot presses the wrong button and we are all toast'.

The Beatles and the Rolling Stones weren't the only all-British bands playing all-British music, the Kinks, Spencer Davis, Gerry and the Pacemakers and many more, now long forgotten, sprang up as if from nowhere. Even Blackburn, that grimy 'snug as a bug in a rug' mill town had its own rock and roll band, The Four Pennies. Their first single 'Juliet' made number one in the charts in 1964. As Jenny and I started going to Saturday night dances the American style dance band, complete with a gallery of trumpet and saxophone players was being replaced by rock and roll four-piece bands, first as stand-ins during the resident bands rest period. Funny thing is, most of us would stop dancing and gather round the stage to listen to these interval players. I was a devoted Beatles fan. The Beatles hailed from Liverpool not 30 miles from Darwen; the Rolling Stones were from a different country somewhere to the south of Manchester. The Mersey Beat had arrived.

Mum's Operation

The only blot on this otherwise happy time was Mum's brush with death. As a teenage immersed in your own world and not really taking in what was happening on the home front, Mum's sudden disappearance into hospital for a hysterectomy operation came as a complete surprise. A hysterectomy was a very serious, risky procedure back then. I don't know even now why she needed to have such a drastic procedure, there being no mention of cancer, just women's problems.

On the day of the operation I was at school as usual, when Dad called the school secretary and asked for me to be sent home ASAP. The operation had gone awfully wrong and Mum wasn't expected to survive the next 24 hours. We never knew if it was the surgeon's incompetence or if Mum's ailment was far worse than expected. The medical profession always covers for each other and you couldn't get a straight answer to a straight question. I suspect Dad probably never asked the question why she had become so ill so quickly anyway.

Dad and I set off post haste to the hospital in Blackburn and I had only been on Mum's ward for a couple of minutes when I disgraced myself by fainting. Mum looked absolutely terrible, ashen grey face with a drip needle stuck into her foot. That was too much for me and I promptly fell over. A nurse helped me into the ward bathroom and administered me smelling salts. The only upside was the sight of me keeling over made Mum smile. Mum did

survive the post operation trauma and following her release from hospital spent a further six weeks at a rehabilitation centre in Southport on the Lancashire coast, some 40 miles from Darwen. She must have been away from home for at least two months in total.

Dad was completely useless at domestics. I don't remember him ever cooking a meal or even washing up, let alone clean the house or doing the ironing. Mark was 14 at the time so it fell to me to take on the running of the household. And I enjoyed it!!! Always have been a control freak and loved being in charge of everything. Joan, Mum's closest friend, came around to help but must have decided that I was managing well enough on my own. She arrived one day to find me ironing, stayed for a cup of tea whilst I continued to iron and then departed, leaving me to it. Very sensible woman Joan and I'm eternally grateful to her for letting me take charge. Stood me in good stead for the future and helped make me self-reliant and sufficient.

(14th November 2012 – Penang)

Learning to Drive

My 17th birthday saw me the proud owner of a provisional driving license. I think I was the first to reach driving age in the sixth form. Dad taught me to drive in the old Wolesley which was really getting past its scrap by date at 16 years old. Dad and I had already replaced the engine a couple of times and bolstered up the rotting body work with barks of 2 by 2 timbers. Dad was friendly with the guy who did the new-fangled MOT in the centre next to the Ritherdon's Lorne St. factory and a nod and wink used to get the car a pass. Springtime each year we would take the old girl up onto a quiet road on the moor between Darwen and Bolton to give her a coat of paint using an ordinary paint brush and black, Dulux gloss paint from a tin. She was completely under powered and if you took her up to anything like fast, she was almost uncontrollable. I soon realized why Dad always took two days to recover when he drove us to our holiday destination each year.

Dad's strategy was to teach me the basics and then polish off my driving skills with lessons from a professional driving school instructor, which worked. Just after that Christmas 1964, I passed the driving test first time, despite turning left at a junction when the examiner asked me to turn right. Always have had difficulty with my left and right. Hear one and do the other. Strange. Now I had a car to drive and a girlfriend. No more late-night busses home from Bolton to Darwen on a Saturday night. Luxury, even if the transport was a bit ragged around the edges and smelt like a musty old carpet.

Soon after I passed the driving test Dad bought me a car. OK, it only cost £25 and we had to tow it home from the abattoir where it was decaying under a disintegrating tapeline, but it was a Morgan Sports Car. I hadn't heard of Morgans until the day Dad took me with him to collect the poor old thing. FUA, the letters preceding the numbers on the plate, was a 1937 4/4 Series 1 Flat Rad. It was love at first sight. Perhaps it was more than love? From that

day on for the next 40 years I was to own a series of Morgans. Morgans are still built today in the same factory in Malvern as this first car of mine. The latest model at the time of writing this is the Aero 8, a super-fast, super slick looking beast of a car.

The 4/4 referred to 4 cylinders and 4 wheels. The Morgan company founded in 1909 by H. F. S. Morgan, a vicar's son, initially started producing three wheeled cars powered by twin 'V' motor bike engines. The unique design feature was the third wheel, the driven wheel, at the back of the trike and the engine at the front, making the car very stable. In fact, a three wheeled Morgan won the 1913 Cyclecar Grand Prix at Amiens in France averaging over 100 miles per hour. The fourth wheel was added in 1936 and the first model became known as the 4/4 Series 1.



Morgan 4/4 Series 1 Flat Rad Roadster

Morgans have always had a racing streak but my sad FUA, built in 1937, was a two-seater with a 1,122 Coventry Climax engine generating only 34 bhp, which even in a fit state to drive wouldn't have propelled the car at any great pace. Boys being boys, of course, fitted the car with much meatier power units, for which the chassis was ideally suited. You could shoehorn practically anything under that huge bonnet. Indeed, Morgan in 1968 introduced



1938 Morgan 4/4 Series 1 Flat Rad in racing trim

to the world the +8 which sported a 3.5 litre 'V' 8-cylinder engine under the same bonnet. These +8 cars went like the proverbial shit off a shovel, getting to 60 mph in just over 4 seconds.

But all this was in the future. I really did try to restore FUA before the end of the upper sixth with the idea of taking her to university with me. But it was not to be. FUA was gently taken

apart and each piece lovingly cleaned and stored. Most of the bits and pieces ended up in the attic at 105 and stayed there for the next 10 years until I had a garage to work in and the money to put the poor dear back together again. Not that I didn't give it a good go. Dad and I even built a garage in the back yard at 105 and had replacement chassis members made at Ritherdon's. But all to no avail. In any case, the love affair had begun.

(16th November 2012 – Penang)

Family Life

Mark didn't manage to pass the watershed 11 Plus exams. This should have meant him attending one of the three secondary schools in Darwen town, but Mum considered these establishments to be sink schools. The students at the end of five years study left the secondary schools with no recognised qualifications and no future. After a short battle with the local education authority, out of which there could only have been one winner, Mark was allowed to go to St. Peter's School in Blackburn. Even though this would mean Mark spending up to two hours a day travelling to and from school, Mum considered it worthwhile. St. Peter's, although a secondary school, did allow students to sit for 'O' levels which were seen by Mum as a passport to a decent job and career.

With Mark at St. Peter's and me at the grammar school, Mark's and my interests drifted apart. Mark became good friends with Brian whose father had a farm on the outskirts of Blackburn and weekends would see the two of them at the farm ferreting. Ferreting involves using a tame ferret which they encouraged down rat holes around the farmyard to flush out the rats. Once the poor rat emerged from another nest exit, Mark and Brian would attempt to snuff it out with stones fired from catapults. All good sport apparently, but it was completely lost on me. My guess is that few rats left this world at the hands of Mark and Brian. Rats can move at an incredible speed and I cannot imagine that catapults are accurate enough to come close to hitting one. Shotgun, yes. Catapults? I don't think so.

Mark also took up fishing in a big way too. He would go coarse fishing in the River Ribble on a stretch between Blackburn and Preston. He accumulated a lot of fishing kit by the end, including some impressive waders which he used to gain better access to the unsuspecting fish. I did go with him a couple of times and when I had learnt to drive, I would go and pick him up in the evening after a day at the river. A very peaceful place, the River Ribble.

The summer of '64 was the last summer we took a holiday as a family. Having 'done' Scotland, Mum now turned her sights on the Republic of Ireland and a driving tour of the west coast for the two weeks' vacation. We crossed to Dublin on the car ferry from Holyhead and drove the old Wolesley down the Irish coast to Cork and then west across the island to Galway. The reaction everywhere to the old car was surprising, lots of smiles and pointing at this old motor, never before seen in Ireland.

It was a great last holiday together as a family. We visited the cliffs of Morne, which had a lasting impression on me. Shades of the Lieutenant's Woman and David Lean's Ryan's Daughter. Mark and I went cycling on the empty roads, drinking cider together on the roadside, all very daring. Mark had, of course, brought some fishing gear and I actually caught a pike from the lake behind a cottage we stayed in. This was the first and last time I caught anything with a hook and worm. Mum decided it must be edible and cooked it up

for dinner that night. Pike has quite an oily flesh and a lot of the poor thing was left uneaten. Mark decided we would try night fishing and ran a line from our bedroom window out into the lake. All in vain, as next morning the line was as limp as the night before. I bought Jenny a present of Connamara Marble set in a silver bracelet. Still have it in her old jewellery box.

On the way home, Dad let me drive the stretch from Holyhead across the north of Wales to home. It was the first time I had driven any great distance and at one stage I nearly fell asleep!!! Night driving on busy roads was also a new challenge, with me tending to drive towards the oncoming lights. But Dad was very patient as ever and let me get used to the new driving conditions, even if I did give the rest of the family a few hairy moments.

The Upper Sixth

Over the summer of '64, the lower sixth morphed into the upper sixth. There was no end of year exams, just normal classes up to the last day in school. At the start of the new autumn term, the sixth form had shrunk to around 25 students. A handful of students had left to take up gainful employment, including Stanley who preferred to earn money rather than study. Being in the upper sixth meant becoming a school prefect, the foot soldiers in the deputy head's attempts to keep good discipline in the lower forms. Well, every other sixth former except yours truly and my friend Raymond. He and I were the only ones not awarded the coveted prefect's badge which allowed you to boss about the younger kids. By way of contrast, Jenny was made deputy head, much to her own surprise.

The reason for this singling out was rooted in a confrontation I had had with Scott, the deputy headmaster during the lower sixth, not long after Jenny and I became an item. Scott called me off the corridor into his room one day for a little chat. He told me it was a bad idea for me to be 'going out' with Jennifer as he thought her very capable and would do really well in the 'A' level exams but I was in danger of screwing that up by distracting her from her studies. Needless to say, I was a bit taken aback and not a little annoyed by his intended interference. I responded by saying it really was none of his business who Jenny dated and left the room. How could I have been so bold! When I told Jenny about the interview she laughed and told me not to worry, she did indeed have a mind of her own.

After the Scott incident, I did look at things a little differently. Upper sixth formers were expected to read a 'lesson' from the bible at the daily morning school assemblies. This was done on a rota so that every sixth former got a chance to perform. I refused to do it. I had rejected religion when I was 12 years old and I wasn't going to be hypocritical by saying prayers that I considered meaningless or read from a 'big' book. I also was incapable of reading out loud. I would read one thing and say another. I can still do that trick, even today. Which of these two reasons lay behind my decision to refuse to join the morning reading rota, I will leave you to decide. By the upper sixth I had also given up going to the

morning assembly altogether. I suppose I must really have blotted my copy book, being seen as a bit of an awkward sod.

Games were another ritual I refused to join in with. Wednesday afternoons would find Raymond Lightbown, Jim Bennetts, and myself in the warmth of the school library chewing the fat putting the world to rights, if the room was empty, or catching up on schoolwork if there were other students around. Ray, who was gay, could no longer bear to be in the changing room or showers with a lot of naked young men. Jim, who had contracted polio at a very young age, had been left with a severe limp and could not charge around a playing field after a flying ball. As for me, I just hated ball games and being told I had to join in because it was good for me. One memorable day the games master came to seek us out in the library and after a short discussion as to why the three of us refused to join the others outside on the freezing cold playing field, he clearly saw he was wasting his time and left after we assured him we would get some exercise by walking up the hill behind the school. Which we duly did, and then promptly returned to the library to continue whatever it was we were doing before his failed attempt at getting us to join the rest of his class.

With Jenny the deputy head girl, a rising star, and me, seen as a no hoper at odds with authority, the combination of the two of us must have seemed rather odd to others. The odd couple. But it wasn't odd to us. We just were. Not only did we see each other in every class we attended in school hours, I used to wait with Jenny every night for the school bus to arrive which took her home to Bromley Cross. At weekends we danced on Saturday evenings and I went to her house afterwards to watch the midnight movie, which saw me driving home to Darwen at 1 o'clock on Sunday mornings. Jenny's Mum and Dad would go to bed soon after we arrived home from the evening out and we would curl up on the sofa to watch the film. Sunday morning, I would drive over to go to church with Jenny, despite my aversion to the service and the preaching from the pulpit. Nothing odd about it at all.

(17th November 2012 – Penang)

Preparing to Leave home

The upper sixth was a year spent in earnest preparation for the 'A' level exams and deciding on a university course and university at which to pursue that chosen course. For both Jenny and me, the courses were a given, pure mathematics for Jenny and mechanical engineering for me. Jenny considered pure mathematics an art form and was totally dedicated to practicing mathematics as an artist practices painting or musician music. She had no real idea about a career linking with mathematics, she just knew she had to be doing pure mathematic. For me the course linked to a job at least, something in the engineering line.



Upper Sixth

Ray and Jim fourth and fifth and me right most on the back row. Chas second from left and Fats on far right of the front row Mr. Scott middle front.

We both suffered rejections from our first choices of course and university. My application to join the Royal Corp of Naval Constructors was not supported by the school and therefore floundered. Jenny had set her heart on going to Cambridge but was rejected at the interview stage. She returned from the day at the university not in the best of moods. The interview had focused not on her ability in mathematics but on her background. The interviewer had asked her where she spent her holidays and Bournemouth with her Mum and Dad didn't impress. Every year without fail, Jenny with her Mum and Dad, would spend two weeks in Bournemouth. Cambridge was looking for prospective students that had a wider social background than you can get as the daughter of an engineering foreman living in a semidetached house in Bromley Cross. Jenny was not impressed at all with the perceived snobbery of it all and decided that Oxbridge was not for her.

I visited Sheffield and Birmingham universities for interviews and was offered provision places at both with Birmingham becoming my first choice and Sheffield my second. Completely independently, Jenny also chose Birmingham as her first choice, we both liked the idea of the campus being near the city centre but not part of it. As the school year progressed, we both spent more of our weekends studying. You might think we would have

studied and revised together since we were studying the exact same subjects, but we never did. Jenny much preferred her own company with her textbooks and would dictate the dating schedule, being far more focused on exam success than ever I was.

Dad had fitted out the front room at 105 as a study with a huge flat-topped table desk. He had already made and fitted bookshelves around two walls for his collection of old books. He and I had visited the second-hand book stalls on Shudehill in Manchester many times together, trawling for 19 century textbooks on mechanics. Dad also fitted a gas fire, there being only one other heating source in the house prior to that in the main living room. Chas and Fats who were also doing mathematics and physics 'A' level often came over of an evening to form a study group. Chas was looking to do chemistry at Manchester University and was aiming at becoming a chemistry schoolteacher. He often got stuck with the geometry aspects of the mathematics syllabus. I enjoyed three-dimensional geometry, much as I enjoy Sudoku today. Always a puzzle.

The school suggested that Jenny and I should sit for the additional papers to two of our 'A' level subjects: Jenny mathematics and further mathematics, and me mathematics and physics. This would mean sitting for 11 exams in total, including the general paper that everybody had to sit. Oh well, in for a penny in for a pound, although if the school thought me capable of passing the additional papers why hadn't they supported my application to the RNCC?

Work, work, work. That was the year that was. Passed paper after passed paper. Dad arranged for extra tutorials with a friend's son who was doing his doctorate in some aspect of mechanical engineering at Manchester University, just as insurance you understand!!!

(1st December 2012 – Singapore)

[Polly Was Here](#)

We are in Singapore for a couple of weeks, returning to Penang on the 9th December. We will be meeting Polly at Changi airport and flying home to Penang together with her. Polly will be with us for two weeks. We haven't seen each other since July 2009, so a bit of catching up to do.

The upper sixth year went by very smoothly. That is until the last day of term. Traditionally, the last day at school was associated with the upper sixth formers doing something daft, like sticking a bra on top of the school flagpole or some such naughty thing. All quite harmless normally but not our year. Oh no, we decided to go to the pub at the bottom of the school drive for lunch. Oh dear. The headmaster just got to hear we had all gone for drinks at a pub, but he didn't know which one. We hadn't invited the head boy, so his chief spy had no idea where we all were either. It was all quite amusing for us, watching the teachers bombing down the school's drive in their cars, sent on missions to seek us out. Not one of

them thought to look under their noses, in the pub at the school gates!!! I still have the photograph of Jim, Ray and myself sitting in the bar with our glasses of lemonade.



In the Golden Cup with Chas and Ray

After we had finished our lunch, we all walked back together into school as a group to be rounded up and given a telling off individually by the headmaster, Abbot, and his deputy, Scott. The next thing we knew we had all been expelled, in the last 2 hours after 7 years at the school!!!! Mum was not amused but Dad thought the whole thing hilarious. I think the other parents took the view that the punishment did not fit the crime, and during the next week, Abbot reinstated us. As it turned out, ours was the most

successful sixth form in the school's history in terms of 'A' level exam results. Expelling all of us made Abbot and Scott look a bit nannyish. The incident must have given the lower sixth following us a new benchmark for their last day in school.

The summer following the 'A' level exams was spent waiting, waiting, waiting for the results to come out in the August. Chas and I got a summer labouring job at the Walpamur Paints factory in the town through a school friend whose dad was a manager there. All sorts of dirty jobs we were given to do, jobs nobody else would do and very smelly most of the time, paint fumes all over the site. You couldn't get away from the smell of solvents. Getting your first pay pack ever was a major thrill, a brown paper envelope with notes and coins inside. A moment to savour.

Chas and I decided to make one last train spotting trip to Doncaster, just for old time sake that summer. Fats and Stan joined us, and it was quite a day. Since we had stopped our regular weekend trips on the railways of England some 3 years before, standing on the ends of drafty railway platforms sometimes being moved on by the railway police, the hobby seemed to have lost its appeal. Apart from a couple of middle-aged men, we were the only spotters. I guess the rise of the diesel engine which meant the decline of the steam engine had taken some of the romance out of the spotting. Seeing a steam engine going at full tilt, you cannot help but be thrilled by the sight. Like you are watching some sort of crazy out of this world animal in a full charge, full of movement and snorts.

The summer of 1965 also saw my uncle Frank, his wife Joyce and my cousins Stephen and David packing their bags and emigrate to Australia. Uncle Frank was being sent by his company, the de Havilland Aircraft Company, to service the jet fighters they had sold to the

Granddad Stories.

Australian Royal Air force, all very exciting and not a little daunting for them all. Grandma Ribchester organized a going away party for her son and family at her house in Rowena St., Farnworth. This is the one and only time I can remember the four siblings and their families being altogether in one place at the same time. Dad commented that Granddad Ribchester seemed a little over awed by the fact he was responsible for the assembled Ribchester tribe. It would be nearly 20 years before Grandma would see her son Frank again and 45 years before I would see my cousins Stephen and David.

With the summer months coming to an end the results day did finally dawn. Most of my comrades gained the grades they need to do whatever they had set their sights on. Jenny got her three A's and both her special papers, also with maximum grade points. Me, I made an A and two B's with grade point 2 in the two special papers. To say I was made up is an understatement. Not only was I bound for Birmingham University, but Jenny was going to be there too!!

Memory Litter Bin.

1. **Trip to Foula.** – Whilst on holiday in the Shetland Isles, we took a day trip over the sea to Foula, an island some 20 miles out in the Atlantic west of the Shetland Islands. I was keen to go, being an avid bird spotter at the time, as there was a puffin colony on the island I wanted to see. Our transport was a very small fishing boat and on the day of our trip the skipper asked those assembled on the quay for the trip if we really wanted to go, seeing as how the sea was running quite high that day. To a man and woman, we said yes, let's go for it, after all how bad could it be, it was a bright sunny day after all, with hardly a cloud in the sky. The skipper shrugged and acquiesced muttering something about Atlantic swells and storms out in the ocean, but at least he had given us the option to bail out and get our money back.

Well he was right, of course, it was pretty rough during the crossing with most of us being seasick before we reached Foula some three and a half hours later. But it was worth the agony. We trekked across the island to the west side and the cliff tops where the puffins had a large colony. The trek necessitated crossing rough heath land which was home to nesting skuas who continuously bombed our heads as we entered their nesting territories. When it first happened, it was, to say the least, a bit of a shock to have a large eagle sized bird bounce off your head. Mark and I took to continually whirling out sweaters around our heads to deter the blighters, but to no avail, the monsters continuing to dive bomb us all the way across the island.

The island is a magical place and the puffins were very cute and quite tame, not seeming to mind these strange humans watching their comings and goings.

Notes