This book is dedicated to ...

the memory of my mother and father, Phyllis and Jack who feature throughout the book. They did a grand job raising their sometimes challenging deaf kid under sometimes difficult circumstances. They gave me love and encouragement all the way and I owe them my gratitude. Thank you.

Bucket on t' Stairs

Growing up as a deaf kid in West Yorkshire in the 1950s and 1960s

Neil Marsden

Éditions Rose

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English edition published in France by
Éditions Rose

Bucket on t' Stairs is the author's account of his growing up as a deaf kid in West Yorkshire in the 1950s and 1960s. It ends on the eve of his starting as an undergraduate at the University of Reading, Berkshire. The book is based on events and people in the author's life.

Cover image Commercial Street, Batley 19th Century courtesy of Rose Photo Archive AI

ISBN 979-10-981738-0-6 (paperback)

Éditions Rose
Publisher: David G. Rose
La Séchetterie, 53250 Villepail, France
www.ramblingrose.eu
email: editeur@ramblingrose.eu

British-English spelling is used in this book. Font licensing correct at time of publication.

Acknowledgements

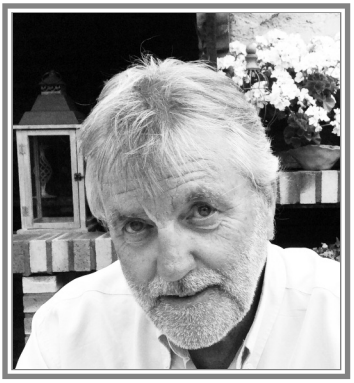
The writing of this book was inspired by Rosalie the wife of my university friend David Rose. She is the author of her memoires, **Naked Nurse: My life in Nursing**. The book was edited and published by David in 2013.

Rosalie was brought up in Yorkshire and her book includes describing her life in 1940s and 1950s Sheffield. Reading her book brought back many memories of my own childhood from the same era in my home town of Batley in West Yorkshire.

When together, Rosalie and I enjoy lapsing into our finest broad Yorkshire accents as we reminisce. One day she suggested, "eeh bah gum lad, why don't yer write a book abart yer upbringing in mucky old Ba'ley?" So the idea was born. **Bucket on t' Stairs** describes my childhood as a deaf kid in grimy post-industrial West Yorkshire in the 1950s and '60s in a one-up, one-down house that was eventually demolished before it fell down.

David, who I have called Uncle since our student days, offered to publish the book and has spent many patient hours knitting together memories and stories, putting them into a readable form. The book paints a picture of a by-gone era in the only way I know how, bah tellin' it 'ow it were! David encouraged me to write the book in my original Yorkshire accent - which is still largely there.

My thanks to Rosalie for her inspiration and to David for his hard work and patience.



Neil Marsden

Writing **Bucket on t' Stairs** was a joyful trip down Memory Lane. I am of the last of the Baby Boomers who remember the post-war 'Fifties and roaring 'Sixties, the hardship and the excitement. To produce for posterity an account of this era has been thrilling.

To create authenticity in Yorkshire life my story is told in Yorkshire dialect. That some may not understand it initially troubled me but my publisher encouraged it because over time proud, broad Yorkshire has become diluted. The book brings it back to life.

I have laughed recounting the amusing stories and wiped away tears remembering the sad. It has been an emotional return. The nineteen-fifties and sixties were over half a century ago but I enjoyed every minute re-living them.

Chapter One

Nah then, me name's Neil. Ah were born a while ago, in 1950, in mucky Batley in heart o' West Yorkshire. Locals drop t' 't' and pronounce it Ba'ley. It's a way o' saving breath an' livin' longer. Me mother wanted t' call me Angus 'cos she thowt it were reeght romantic an' Scottish; daft really 'cos she'd never bin there an' she, an' me dad never 'ad time for romance. Me 'alf-brother Keith, begged 'er t' call me summat different 'cos there were a cow wi' same name. Thanks then to our Keith for the life-time's favour.

Mother were bit of 'n old hen at 40 when she 'ad me. Well, old f'r 1950. She were reeght ill for ages after, probably wi' shock o' seeing me. She recovered but were never strong woman again. Mind you, she lived t' 84, bless 'er. She'd never smoked a fag in 'er life but were a heavy secondary smoker o' Dad's Capstan Full Strengths.

Folks them days 'adn't 'eard of 'ealthy living or 'ealthy eating. In t' early 'Fifties they were lucky t' ave food never mind their 'ealth thanks to 'Itler an' 'is war in Europe an' food rationing at 'ome. Ah remember food coupons mother gave me f'r corner shop for us sliced white bread an' two ounces of butter for t' week. Me dad ate his sandwiches wi' dripping. This were white fat from unusable parts o' cows an' pigs which 'ad brown bits in that were reeght tasty. Folk ate it wi' loads o' salt. Everything were eaten wi' salt then. Folk sprinkled it on their food before even tasting it.

Dad were thirteen years younger than Mum. He looked young for 'is age and me mum older. 'E used t' joke she were his muther, an' some folks believed 'im, which made 'er reeght mad. She were a widow when they married. Her first husband were thirty years older than 'er, so old lass went from one extreme t' other. Her first husband were named Harry. He were widower wi' two daughters,

one o' which were older than me mum. Eeh, we were a reeght queer family.

Harry fought in First World War at Passchendale. Joked 'e were awarded Long Service Medal f'r not getting killed over months he were facing Germans in Flanders. He were also awarded Oak Leaf medal for being mentioned in dispatches for outstanding bravery in face of t' enemy. Medal came wi' a certificate signed by Winston Churchill.

Harry were a machine gunner, an' during a German attack a shell landed in 'is machine gun pit an' killed or maimed t' others but Harry carried on firing 'cos 'e thought it safer than running off. He were being modest, or were scared witless. Mum told me years later Harry had an unfortunate saying 'e 'd learnt during 'is six-weeks training, "t' only good foreigner's a dead 'un ..." That were drummed into all soldiers in the regiment. Ah remembered it too an' it made me realise how t' young an' inexperienced are easily led.

Harry's medals were kept in a brass box embossed wi' symbols o' British Empire. When ah were a nipper ah swapped t' Oak Leaf medal for me mate's toy Luger. Years later ah had a terrible conscience when our Keith asked where medal were. Ah confessed to me sin but neither 'e nor Mum told me off, an example of honesty being best policy.

Ah suppose ah were summat of a lonely child wi' me deafness but ah 'ad me half-brother, Keith. Trouble were our Keith were thirteen years older than me an' so we were nearly a generation apart. 'Is dad, Harry died in 1946 when Keith were eight. Ah were never told much about Harry other than 'e were good bloke. Despite t' age difference Mum said her an' Harry had been reeght happy together. In photos 'e looked proper 'andsome in 'is flat cap. He were manager at a local mill. Mum said Harry came 'ome from Soothill Working Men's Club one Sunday afternoon early in their

marriage an' dozed off in 'is favourite armchair in front o' fire. She'd made 'im a cuppa and give 'im a shake t' wekken 'im up but 'e were deed. Said it were shock of 'er life.

Mum worked at t' same mill an' Harry took a shine t' lass. She'd 'ad hard upbringing an' a weak heart. Folk allus said this if you were weak through lack o' food or were always breathing heavy because of foul air. During her early life she'd lived wi' different folk, reason being that 'er mum, Polly, 'ad three kids out o' wedlock an' couldn't cope. Were a shameful thing in 1910. Dad said Mum married Harry 'cos 'e were security. Dad knew Harry from Soothill Working Men's Club before War an' had respect for him which may have contributed to Dad adapting to his role as step-father t' Keith. They got on well an' Dad treated Keith as if he were 'is own.

When ah were young an' couldn't understand nowt, ah were told Harry deed through shortness o' breath but ah reckon it were 'eart attack. You didn't 'ave to ask what folks 'ad deed of 'cos you knew it were dicky 'eart or bad lungs. Chapels o' Rest hadn't been invented so Harry's body were laid out in open coffin on dining room table 'cos there were nowhere else t' put it. Mum said it made 'er reeght nervous seein' poor bugger staring at ceiling an' said she felt bad after staining 'is shroud wi' tomato sauce whilst washin' up an' talking to 'im.

She apparently hadn't seen her mother, Polly's, bottom drawer. Being Victorian she were prepared for t' event of 'er death. She showed it me when ah were a nipper. It 'ad a lovely embroidered shroud t' cover 'er body an' two pennies wi' embroidered white linen o'er 'em. These were to put over 'er eyes. It were either that or a bit of glue t' hold coins.

When me uncle Herman died of 'eart attack when ah were six, ah were taken t' pay respects to 'im laid out in coffin in 'is front parlour. As we filed past coffin Mum squeezed me hand 'cos ah'd never seen anybody deed before. She looked down a' uncle

Herman's pineapple-coloured face an' said,

"Doesn't 'e look well?"

She bent over an' kissed 'is forehead an' gestured ah did t' same but ah shook me head 'cos ah were frightened 'e might wekken up. Afterwards ah asked Mum how somebody deed could look well? She explained after 'is first 'eart attack 'e looked terrible but after t' second one that finished 'im off his face were more relaxed. Kissing 'is forehead would stop 'is spirit coming back t' bother me. Ah regretted not giving 'im a goodbye kiss 'cos of this. It were nowt personal, Uncle Herman.

Mum 'ad to leave Harry's house wi' young Keith when Harry died. Ah supposed Mum's house in 1949, a one-up-one down 'afore she married me dad were all she could get at the time.

Dad's dad were called Fred. He died when ah were baby. He were 'eavy beer drinker an' walked 'ome from club wi' 'is 'ead reeght back so beer wouldn't tipple out. He worked in a foundry in Huddersfield pouring molten metal into moulds made o' black sand. Heat were so intense that pourers 'ad to turn their faces away from it. Result were that Grandad Fred 'ad bald patch on back of 'is 'ead where t' hair were burnt off.

For a while, 'afore he married Mum, Dad an' Fred worked in Hopkinson's Valves Engineers in Huddersfield and travelled on same train. If they got t' Huddersfield station in good time after work, Fred would say they 'ad time for a pint 'cos there were pub on platform. Then when train came Fred would instruct me dad t' get on' train, get 'ome an' t' tell 'is mum t' put dinner in oven 'cos 'e would be late. He would then carry on supping 'til next train. He couldn't do wi'out 'is ale.

Fred an' me grandma Elsie 'ad six kids, Archie, Fred, Eric, Audrey, Elsie an' Jack. Jack were me dad. There were a mystery daughter called Frances. When ah were of age of understanding, Dad explained that Fred went t' fight in t' Middle East in t' First World War an' caught Black Water Fever. He were away three

years an' returned t' find he'd got a nine month-old daughter. Apparently 'e said nowt abart it an' browt 'er up as 'is own. Maybe 'is maths weren't reeght good.

Mind you, years later 'e got 'is own back on Elsie's infidelity by getting 'imself a bit on t' side. He told Elsie he'd started watching Huddersfield Town football team play on Saturday afternoons, home an' away, after which he'd 'ave a few pints wi' 'is mates but 'e weren't, 'e were wi' fancy bit. Elsie suspected summat when another Huddersfield Town supporter she knew told 'er tha' they'd 'adn't seen Fred at any o' their matches. Elsie put out 'er spies an' managed t' get address o' fancy bit. She took train t' Huddersfield an' went by 'orse 'n' cart t' house of fancy piece an' knocked on 'er front door. Door opened an' there were Fred in armchair in front o' fire reading paper wi' a glass o' beer in 'is 'and. He were caught red-handed.

House we lived in from 1950 were off Soothill Lane, pronounced 'Sue-till,' which sounds posher than Soot Hill. It were abandoned industrial area o' old pits. There were mountains of coal washings called pit hills big enough t' have names. Two biggest were Red Hill an' Dragon's Back. Me an' me mates dug a tunnel ten feet in t' side of one that became us den. Must 'ave 'ad thousand tons o' slag over us heads. How tunnel di'n't collapse, God only knows. Maybe 'e were working class an' kept an eye on us welfare.

Kids did what they wanted in 'Fifties an' their parents didn't worry, or didn't know what we were up to, or weren't reeght bothered. Society were safer then. Mr Whippy a' school gate only sold ice-cream. Nobody got knifed, or sniffed or snorted, or owt like that, apart from occasional wicked Woodbine down t' woods if we could scrape pennies together. Corner shop sold 'em singly.

You went out t' play in morning an' came back when it were tea time. Kids know when that is. We didn't have watches. You got

one f'r your twenty-first birthday or on retirement, when you didn't really need one anyway.

Kids didn't get dropped off a' school 'cos no-one had a car, except t' poshest folk. Storm, hail, snow or fog, you got t' school on yer own two feet. F'r some kids it were miles an' they would be sobbin' wi' frozen legs an' blue knees if snow were really comin' down.

Ah were a reeght tear away from the start a' Gregory Street School aged five, 'cos ah were born deaf. Pardon, I think folk said. Actually, ah were 'ard at 'earing, which is a mouthful an' deaf's quicker to say. Out o' thirty-two kids in me class ah 'ad distinction of being bottom in every subject 'cos ah couldn't hear nowt. Every school 'ad a disruptive pupil an' I were ours. Ah could see teacher's mouth move an' 'ear sounds coming out but couldn't understand what she were saying. Standing sulkily in a corner facing wall ah were never sure if it were privilege or punishment or cure f'r me unruliness.

Teachers hated me 'cos ah never did what ah were told, 'cos ah couldn't hear instructions. It were made worse when ah were told t' sit at back o' class out o' way so ah were less disruptive. Ah could 'ear even less then, an' sometimes nodded off through sheer boredom, an' got ticked off f'r that. For an active primary school kid, sat on 'is arse for hours in silence is an eternity. Ah were subconsciously learning t' lip read but from t' back o' classroom could hardly see teacher's face, never mind see 'er mouth moving.

Mum an' Dad were called t' school when I were eight 'cos teachers said I couldn't talk proper. Dad were furious 'cos 'e thought headmistress talked like she 'ad a gobstopper in 'er mouth. Anyway, wi' much frowning and head-shaking ah were sent off t' Bradford Infirmary where ah were declared deaf, which weren't a surprise 'cos me mum, 'er mum an' half 'er family were deaf; it were generic, they said. It took eight years t' discover the obvious.

On second visit t' Infirmary wi' Mum for t' hearing aid fitting, Teacher o' Deaf advised that Mum an' Dad an' me should learn deaf sign language. She demonstrated by waving 'er hands about, tapping 'er fingers an' exaggerating 'er facial expressions like she'd gone bonkers. Mum looked on bewildered bu' understood t' concept from lasses workin' in noisy mill 'aving t' sign t' each other. She put idea t' Dad who said 'e didn' 'ave time f'r such things. She gave 'im a demonstration an' 'e burst out laughing saying it were funniest thing he'd seen in years. He blocked t' idea 'cos 'e didn't want whole o' Soothill thinking Marsden family 'ad turned into bunch o' lunatics. 'E said it were 'ard enough learning meaning of flags in t' Navy an' anyway, what were wrong with a 'earing aid?

When ah returned t' school pleased as Punch, ah were sportin' a big black shiny 'earing aid, which folks wrongly called a deaf aid 'cos they don't enhance deafness. It were a revelation. Suddenly, I were paying attention and weren't causing trouble. Ah could hear teacher properly for first time. Lessons suddenly became interesting rather than like me bein' on a silent film set. Ah actually started t' enjoy school.

Other kids were soon jealous an' started pretending they were deaf 'cos they wanted t' latest gadget, a hearin' aid. Ah came eighth in next exam an' top o' class thereafter f'r rest o' me time a' Juniors. Despite this rise t' intellectual stardom, the teachers still hated me 'cos they'd been wrong about me. Ah weren't delinquent now, jus' deaf an' a clever little bugger.

In me last year when ah were eleven, I were awarded a school prize. Headmistress's face were a picture of discomfort when she presented prize, a book wi' sticker inside which read, "To Norman, Outstanding Pupil Of The Year." They never did get me name right at Juniors. Final laugh were also on me. I were awarded a place a' Batley Grammar Boys School wi'out having t' sit 11-plus exam. Poor little deaf kid, eh.

Dad never seemed bothered about 'is upbringing in a back-t'-back in Batley. Yorkshire were notorious for 'em, built in their tens o' thousands in late nineteenth Century in rows like you see in Corrie. They were quick cheap housing f'r country folk who trekked in t' industrial towns looking for work. They were built in blocks of eight, four in a line backing on another four. They shared four outdoor toilets wi' ash pit an' bin yard.

There were three types o' these houses. First were one-up an' one-down that were a bedroom an' living room. Second type were same but wi' two bedrooms an' living room wi' scullery. Third type were same as second but grander wi' attic bedroom wi' iron-framed skylight window. All 'ad a cellar wi' glazed stone Belfast sink wi' cold water tap an' a set pot, a bloody big iron pot yer lit a coal fire underneath t' heat water f'r washing. There were a coal 'ole in pavement wi' an ornamental cast iron grill, the same in which ah earned me first pocket money doing coal man's job. Rain came down it as well which always meant cellar were damp.

Dad's family 'ouse in late 'Twenties were so overcrowded tha' six kids slept in same bed, head t' tail like sardines. It were same f'r other families wi' loads o' kids for Empire. There were no formal sex education so folk didn't know 'ow babies were made unless told by a kindly aunt or until it 'appened and they could probably work it out then.

At turn o' twentieth Century, ninety per cent o' houses were privately-rented but after First World War local authorities built Council 'ouses for war heroes. They 'ad proper bathrooms wi' indoor toilets. Eeh, yer were made if y' got new Council 'ouse. Families in mining communities liked bathrooms 'cos miners got free coal an' baths were ideal for storing it. Eventually, Housing Act 1957 put duty on local authorities t' demolish slum houses. It were death knell for back-t'-backs 'cos they were deemed unfit f'r human habitation 'cos they 'ad no through-ventilation as well as

t' other shortcomings.

This meant folks' health suffered 'cos fresh air couldn't get in through front o' 'ouse an' flow out back. T' air in towns an' cities were tha' full o' oily smog folk deed anyway jus' breathin' it.

Like me dad ah were brought up in a late-Victorian dwelling but in comparative luxury wi' only four o' us in two rooms. Our one-up-'n'-one-down also 'ad a cellar. Rent were eight-'n'-a-tanner a week, moaned me dad. We 'ad outdoor toilet shared wi' neighbours old Mr and Mrs Freeman. You collected ash from your coal fire an' sprinkled it underneath wooden toilet seat, did your business then shovelled it up an' dumped it in ash pit. When an icy wind were blowin' through cracks the water in cistern froze solid an' we 'ad t' pour a bucket o' hot water into it f'r miserable flush. This were early 'Fifties, so they 'ad been slums since they were built sixty years 'afore.

Every week Council's shit shoveler with 'is 'orse 'n' cart took yer doin's away. It weren't easy job 'cos shit an' piss would mix wi' ash an' set like cement in yard. Before shovelling it up, bloke would first 'ave t' break it wi' a pitch fork. It were fashionable for men t' 'ave a thick moustache. Trouble were that pitch fork would flick bits o' muck into 'is moustache which would give 'is lunchtime sandwiches a distinctive flavour.

There were no light in toilet and you wiped your arse wi' square o' newspaper from bundle on piece of string hanging on back o' toilet door. Ah 'ad Daily Mirror gossip printed on me arse through me childhood. There were no wash hand-basin in toilet. Personal hygiene 'adn't been invented.

At night we 'ad a bucket on' top o' stairs called pickle bucket. Pickle bucket 'ad handle to lift it up f'r pissin' into. As it got full it got 'eavy for a kid so ah would relieve meself from a standing position. Sometimes me aim weren't reeght good in dark. Consequence were that surrounding wallpaper were stained yellow an' mat on landing had no colour any more. Every

morning, last out a bed emptied pickle bucket sloppin' about, into outdoor toilet a' bottom o' yard. It encouraged me early rising.

Old Mr an' Mrs Freeman 'ad mobility problems an' there were steep slope from their house t' toilet. Old lad were gentleman-type, allus neat in a pin-stripe waistcoat wi' silver watch dangling from 'is pocket. She were a bit rough. Rumour were she'd led 'im astray.

One freezing winter morning whilst carrying their pickle bucket down slope, poor ol' lad slipped. Ah found 'im on 'is back in a bed o' piss-coloured snow. Just laid there in snow an' wi'out a coat until ah helped poor old bugger up. After that 'e emptied pickle bucket into street gully a' front o' 'ouse which were smelly in hot weather but no-one complained. There were no Social Services watchin' in them days.

Our family of four lived in living room. It 'ad a dining table wi' three chairs. There weren't room for four because o' door t' tiny staircase so we never did eat as a family. Door were always kept closed 'cos o' draught. There were a tiny three-piece suite in front o' coal fire which in winter were centre of world. In corner were a kitchen wi' sink an' gas hot water geyser, a 1920s gas cooker an' cupboard.

We all 'ad to wash in kitchen sink. T' age o' five Dad stood me bollock-naked in sink t' splash me down. An early 1950s working class shower. Living room were twelve feet by twelve feet. When friends or family visited we were jam-packed. There were old rug in front o' fire that 'ad black marks on it from lumps o' burning coal. This were before Dad invested in a fire guard which cat loved 'cos it could get nearer burning coals wi'out catchin' fire. We 'ad cat for years wi' out giving 'er a name. She were just 'Puss.'

Coal fire had dual purpose o' providing heat, wi' chimney ventilation for getting rid o' fag smoke. Plenty o' women smoked despite it being unladylike. Uncle Tom's second wife Rose, chained-smoked. Dad said she didn't have a monthly period, she

‘ad a fall of soot. Ah didn’t know what ‘e meant.

The upstairs bedroom ‘ad a double bed for us folks an’ two singles f’r Keith an’ me, all in a row. There were tiny coal fire which were only lit if anyone were ill in bed, in which case nearest bed risked catchin’ fire. When Keith an’ I got older me dad an’ me Uncle Herman (he weren’t me proper uncle, ‘e were just called that) put up a timber an’ ply partition t’ separate bedroom into two even smaller rooms. There were doorway in partition but Dad an’ uncle Herman never fitted a door ‘cos there weren’t space for it to open an’ close so it didn’t do much f’r privacy.

Cellar were like summat from a’ horror film. Off it were even colder, damper space wi’ stone slab f’r keeping meat on. Poor families didn’t have refrigerators in them days. In corner, below ceiling where coal were tipped from pavement, were coal store. Gettin’ it at night were terrifying ‘cos it were pitch black down there. Even t’ brick walls were black. Ah were terrified when it were my turn t’ fetch coal, even during day.

T’ coal ‘ole ‘ad a little chute. Some coal merchants would tip coal down it. Others would dump it on pavement and charge sixpence less an’ you shovelled it in yourself. The shovelling became my job from age seven. I enjoyed it an’ got threepence an’ Dad were ‘appy ‘cos a delivery were threepence cheaper. Opposite our house were a Methodist chapel. Mr Goldthorpe were caretaker who lived in chapel house. Building needed a lot o’ coal in winter and Mr Goldthorpe gave me sixpence a week to shovel it ‘cos he said ‘e were too old an’ it made ‘is back ache. Ah were entrepreneur at eight.

Hanging off nail in cellar wall were big tin bath wi’ handles. This were family bath which every Friday night Dad would lay on cellar floor an’ fill wi’ hot water from a second gas geyser over Belfast sink. A fire ‘adn’t been lit under set pot f’r donkeys years ‘cos there were nowhere f’r smoke to go. No-one were bothered it were same f’r gas geyser fumes. One-by-one we bathed in same

water. Last one f'r wash, usually youngest me, came out muckier than when they went in. Water from geyser came out reeght slow so bath took ages to fill which meant on cold nights bath were already 'alf cold by time you stepped in it. In winter our teeth chattered.

To prevent death by hypothermia Dad fitted a one-bar electric fire above bath. He weren't reeght clever wi' electrics. One flick o' wet towel on electric fire whilst stood in water in a metal bath would 'ave meant cremation. When everyone 'ad finished their mud bath Dad would bucket sludge in t' corner sink. Bath night were a reeght palaver.

Conditions could be as bad in house in winter as outside. In winter months which were 'alf the year, local fresh air were unforgettable. These were t' smogs o' 1950s which were like floundering in cold rancid pea soup. For a 'undred years, hundreds o' thousands o' house chimneys an' countless stacks from mills and factories belched smoke, sulphur dioxide 'n' soot tha' lingered in air. When it were cold an' rainy, which were most of the time, sulphur dioxide dissolved t' form sulphuric acid so folk couldn't breathe proper an' deed.

As a youngster ah remember cars crawlin' along in smogs 'cos driver couldn't see more than three feet ahead. Passengers walked in front 'n' banged bonnet if something loomed like a horse, or lamppost. Folk wi' bad lungs held a hankie over their mouth 'n' nose t' avoid sucking in particles tha' clogged yer lungs an' made you hack green phlegm wi' black bits in.

Old Winston Churchill were Prime Minister a' time, an' newspapers were crying out for action but 'e said government couldn't control weather. 'E were persuaded it were pollution causing oily fog so Government brought in 1956 Clean Air Act. This made everyone burn smokeless fuel like coke tha' were coal wi' tary stuff driven out in coking ovens tha' didn't 'alf stink. Normal coal fires couldn't burn it so Government 'ad to give grants t' buy

new type o' fire t' burn coke. Result were that air were cleaned up an' folks 'ad t' find summat else t' die of.

A health feature o' primary school were being regularly checked by nit nurse. Nits were eggs attached to base of your hair from which lice hatched an' make you scratch. It were embarrassment 'cos it were thowt only mucky families 'ad 'em, an' they were catchin'. Nit check were extra fraught f'r me 'cos ah'd dab a bit o' Dad's Brylcreem on me 'air when 'e weren't abart. Before that ah used 'is Brilliantine which smelled nice but were oily an' Mum complained us heads left stains on back o' settee.

Nit nurse looked wi' contempt at me careful groomin' an' made sure she left it in a mess after she'd checked me roots. She also made a big fuss o' washin' 'er 'ands. Some lads used margarine t' shine their hair an' ah don't know what she thought o' that. Thankfully she never found no nits while ah were at Juniors. She'd shave off your 'air an' clean your 'ead wi' scrubbing brush an' carbolic soap. Ah didn't fancy that. Your bald 'ead were shameful 'cos you might 'ave come from a mucky family.

Through Juniors we also 'ad a jab nurse come to school. We'd line up fidgeting wi' our sleeves rolled up waiting t' be stabbed against whooping cough, diphtheria, tuberculosis an' polio. Vaccination almost eradicated these terrible diseases. Shockingly, fifty years later they are creeping back through ignorance o' how bad they were first-time around. For us kids at time, vaccinations were real scary wi' needles like knitting needles an' syringes the size o' bicycle pumps.

In 1950s we also got free milk an' subsidised dinners. The free milk were introduced in 1946 t' ensure kids got some nutrition inside them f'r general health an' stronger teeth an' bones. The milk came in one-third pint bottles delivered in crates every day. Half-way through morning we would have us milk break. Not all kids liked milk and you weren't forced t' drink it so there'd be left-

over bottles. Ah loved milk an' being a greedy guts would help meself t' at least one o' these.

In addition t' milk, kids got orange juice and cod liver oil from t' welfare clinic. The orange juice needed t' be diluted. It 'ad a distinctive flavour, like oranges I suppose. If kids knew what they tasted like it were because they got an orange or tangerine in their Christmas stocking. The cod liver oil Mum administered wi' a spoon t' mak' sure I took it an' didn't gag it back up. I tolerated it because she followed it wi' a spoonful o' Delrosa Rose Hip syrup which were really sweet. It were rich in vitamin C and were thought t' keep kids free of infections, especially in winter weather. Me last regular nutritional supplement were a daily spoonful of Virol. This were malt extract from the brewing industry. Ah liked flavour 'cos it were like Horlicks.

The Education Act 1944 put a duty on local authorities t' provide school meals so all children had regular healthy food. Sometimes it were only food kids got apart from a slice o' bread an' jam in evening. It 'adn't changed much f'r some kids since 1920s or even Victorian times. School dinners were now subsidised an' free f'r children o' families suffering financial hardship. Our Keith's father died in 1945 when 'e were eight an' so, being a single-parent family Mum were classified as a hardship case an' Keith got free school meals. 'E remembered it as a mixed blessing 'cos there were bit of stigma attached if you were from a recognised poor family.

School meals were good for those families whose mums worked. About half my class o' thirty-two kids, including me, stayed for school dinner. They cost five bob a week. There were a main course of potatoes, two veg and meat or fish followed by a pudding wi' thick custard. In summer we had salad once a week. There were allus seconds available for hungry souls like me. It were like eat as much as you can f'r a bob a day.

The school didn't have a dining hall an' every dinner time we

cleared desks away an' set up folding dining tables an' benches. There were a little kitchen where you'd queue wi' your plate like Oliver Twist. The dinner ladies dolloped t' food onto your plate. You weren't allowed t' refuse anything. Ah think idea were the meals provided a balanced diet an' pickin' an' choosin' defeated objective.

Despite the 1950s an' '60s being a difficult time for me on account o' us living in a slum an' me developing spotty acne, it were an exciting era of change. Many factors drove the changes, including television. Me introduction t' goggle-box were in 1953 when ah were three. We became reeght posh when Dad rented a twelve-inch telly so's Mum could watch Queen's coronation. On t' day, us living room were packed wi' immediate neighbours 'cos we were only ones at our end o' street wi' telly. Folk heard an' watched Richard Dimbleby giving a minute-by-minute account o' who all posh folk were an' historical context o' costumes an' uniforms. You 'ad to use your imagination because picture were small an' grainy an' pomp were in black and white.

This event demonstrated the BBC could show-case royal pomp. They laid miles o' thick cable f'r cameras along the roads from Alexandra Palace in North London to Westminster Abbey an' it were remarkable it went without mishap. The Ally Pally tower were known throughout Empire through cinema newsreels like Pathe News as the symbol of British broadcasting and thereby of Empire itself.

Britain an' the people of its empire, we were led to believe from natives' beaming smiles, loved the royal family. At the end of cinema films an' start and finish of the BBC's daily broadcasts National Anthem were played. Dad, as an ex-Royal Navy man, would stand to attention an' salute. Other folk would at least stand in them days. As a fashionista an' seamstress Mum were a lover of whatever the Queen an' female senior royals were dressed in.

She'd keep an eye on newspapers an' magazines and try t' copy their kit an' it made her day if someone remarked about Queen wearing summat similar.

Aunt Dorothy were t' most patriotic o' our family an' 'ad a cabinet full o' commemorative ware includin' a crazed mug wi' Queen Victoria's 'ead on it which 'ad always been there. She said she'd lay down her life in support o' t' Royals. So ah were brought up in a normal Royals-respectin' family. Elizabeth as new Queen in 1953 were me monarch for sixty-nine years. She never had opportunity t' meet me but she kept her nose clean, managing t' stay out o' trouble whilst her family kept putting their foot in it.

The telly were a blessing f'r Mum when ah were urchin 'cos the kiddies' programmes kept me quiet. They were good for me early intellectual development an' language skills, Bill 'n' Ben The Flower Pot Men an' their pal Little Weeeed; Andy Pandy, Teddy an' Looby Loo and Noddy an' Big Ears. Andy Pandy might have been an early gender bender 'cos ah were never sure if he were a boy or a girl.

There were also a daily Watch With Mother which included episodes of goings-on o' Wooden Tops. Ah soon graduated to The Lone Ranger, the immaculate cowboy wi' black eye mask, white horse an' revolver wi' silver bullets. He an' 'is Red Indian, we called them in those days, side-kick Tonto, were goodies who roamed Wild West sorting out the baddies wi'out work, eating, sleeping or washin' it seemed.

Ah don't think preventing children from watching unsuitable TV programmes were thought about much in the early days o' television 'cos ah remember being frightened out o' me wits wi' Quatermass and the Pit. There were series in 1953, 1955 and 1957. The 1957 production ah watched when ah were seven were about an alien spacecraft found buried in London. They seemed to use tube train tunnels which were already scary. Kids have a vivid imagination an' ah remember hiding behind a chair when the

hair-raising bits came on. It would 'ave resonated wi' adults too who would know the dangers of unexploded bombs an' fiendish German devices from War.

Dad watched telly on evenings when he weren't at club socialising. 'E remembered the Great Depression from 1929 through the early '30s when blokes were laid off 'cos there were no work. Telly then, might 'ave 'elped get folks through to bed time. There would be lines outside mills and factory gates from early morning of men hoping for some work that day. His dad cycled ten miles t' factory on a bone-shaker wi' no gears, t' save on train fares if money were short by end o' week. He'd also do without sandwiches an' work all day on empty stomach pouring molten metal into moulds in a foundry so kids could 'ave bread 'n' butter. 'E needed 'is beer, so that most likely explained his empty pockets.

Things were better in 1950s in that me Dad 'ad regular work an' a wage. Us living conditions hadn't improved in fifty years wi' house rented from Lord Saville Estate. This particular toff were a major landlord in Yorkshire an' member o' House of Lords. He were too busy being posh t' look after poor folks' houses, an' tenants were worried about doing improvements in case rent went up. All mod cons were unknown expression wi' houses like ours. If any of t' feeble electricty, gas or water lines failed we were in trouble. Rent collector came every week f'r our eight-'n'-a-tanner as f'r other folks'. They paid 'im in living room in case 'e thought any improvements would merit rent goin' up.

T' house were proper freezing in winter when icy wind howled off Moors an' fire deed an' despite blankets Mum hung over doors an' windows. There were no insulation under roof an' wooden sash window glass 'ad pretty patterns on inside. Jack Frost 'ad been parents said, as if kids didn't know. Many a kid would wet the bed rather than get up t' pickle bucket or toilet when it were zero

degrees in t' house.

Every winter ah were frozen silly in me iron sprung bed tha' creaked an' groaned wi' me every turn. Ah lost count o' times ah knocked me 'ead on 'eadboard. T' mattress were thin an' stuffed wi' shoddy. Pillow felt like it were full of straw. Duvets 'adn't been invented an' t' pile o' itchy woollen blankets from t' Army an' Navy Stores played havoc wi' me acne when ah hit me teens.

T' mountain o' bedding were topped wi' ancient eiderdown tha' were forever sliding off. In summer ah 'ad cotton sheets an' warmer flannel ones in winter. Mum washed me only pair o' pyjamas every Monday. A rubber 'ot water bottle were passed fro' bed to bed an' were cold by time it got t' me. One night it slipped out o' me bed an' were solid ice in morning.

Tha' bed were still in use in back bedroom in us next 'ouse when house clearance man took it away in 2010. Must 'ave been nigh on hundred years old. Eeh bu' they don't make beds like them any more.

Living room fire usually went out overnight. Dad didn't have time to relight it before goin' to work as it could take an hour o' coaxing, so we'd get up to frozen house. At time you didn't think much on being cold wi' damp bedding an' clothes 'cos you knew nowt different. It 'elped when me dad changed fire grate f'r an 'all-night burner' which meant there were embers to get it going again in morning wi' less faffing.

T' old place 'ad a party piece. It leaned t' right 'cos house next door fell down an' a marble laid on table allus rolled t' right. It gave us semi-detached slum character. Location were nice, wi' view o' countryside. We got through life's trials there through 'Fifties an' 'ad many laughs. Dad gave up tryin' to cope with 'is short-comings o'er state of house an' needs of his growin' kids an' wife but then old lad were only human wi' the regular frailties.

Chapter Two

It took whole of the 1950s for Britain and rest of Europe to begin to rebuild itself after Second World War. It were like no other post-war era in history with the death, displacement and destruction ending in the chilling arrival of t' atomic era. All me aunts an' uncles, me parents to an extent and most of their mates were still full o' war-time stories. Ah listened in awe t' accounts o' hardship, heartache, pain an' bravery. Ah suppose talking about their experiences, particularly the loss of loved ones, were closure. Some couldn't talk about it, f'r others it were best time o' their lives.

At start the Government asked for volunteers f'r Armed Forces. Not long after, men were hauled in whether they liked it or not. Both me Uncle Tom an' me Uncle Edward, Mum's younger brothers, were desperate t' join the war effort wi' out being formally conscripted. They were hard of hearing but didn't 'ave to declare this as volunteers. This were an act of bravery in itself as lack o' hearing could have endangered their lives in a fighting situation. When Edward went t' sign on 'e were told 'e were a few months under age so 'e simply went to another recruitment office an' were enlisted by lying about 'is age.

Edward were in infantry an' involved in some 'ard fighting in Italy. Towards the end o' war after the Italians 'ad capitulated and the Allied forces were driving the Germans north out of Italy, Edward's army unit were pinned down at foot of Monte Casino. The Germans 'ad the advantage of the high ground of the huge monastery and its fortifications. The Allies had air superiority but were loathe to bomb a medieval monastery.