



# *My Early Memories*

(Covering the 1920s through the 1940s)

by

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I have often thought that I would have liked to have kept a diary and compared life as to when I was a youngster over 70 years ago to as it is today, but alas, it is like shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. Now I have decided to write my Memories, so here goes, but one must remember that things will not necessary fall in the correct order, so be patient and try and imagine what I am trying to conjure up in your mind.

I was born in South Wales, in 1923, in a little town called Aberavon, in the Borough of Port Talbot, which was a seaside town set in between a small mountain and what was then a lovely sandy beach. The main places of employment were the Steel works, Tinsplate works and the Docks. Work was not easy to find and I did not leave school until I was 14 years and 6 months old; mind you, we could leave school at 14 in those days. My one and only job was in *Printing* and one had to serve a seven year apprenticeship, but more about that later.

Aberavon was separated from Port Talbot, the boundary being the River Avon and the Aberavon Railway level crossing going across the main road. The trains in those days came down from the Rhondda, Maesteg, Bryn and Cwmavon into Aberavon Town and then onto the Seaside station, which was about 20mins walk away from the beach, where there were plenty of sand dunes and a warren and where Port Talbot Town Cricket Team held their home matches. There was a signal box at Aberavon Station and one of the signal men, a George Thomas, who used to live in Llewellyn St., used to let us lads up into the signal box to see how it all worked. On the other side, Port Talbot Town side, of the level crossing there used to be a massive fruit and vegetables shop called "*Chidzoy's*" and every New Year's day he'd give us kids a bag of fruit if we wished him a "*Happy New Year*"!

**Let's go back to some of the things I can recall earlier on in the late 1920's.**

There was sign writing in the sky. An aircraft would write the word "PERSIL" in white smoke, or it would be an advert for "RINSO", both soap powders, but the other attraction was that it gave us the opportunity to see an aircraft, a sight not seen very often in those days. Occasionally Alan Cobham would fly around in his **Autogiro**, a single engine monoplane with a rotor on the top like a helicopter. To us young lads he was a real life hero, a sort of Biggles, or someone out of one of the stories in the "Hotspur", "Rover", "Skipper", "Wizard", and "Adventure", the 2d (old pence) horrible of the day. One of us would buy one and another would buy another title and swap, so we all kept up to date.

It was on a Saturday afternoon when we would all go to the pictures to see Buck Jones or Tim McCoy in a cowboy film or maybe Tarzan, followed by a serial, usually to do with the Zulus. This went on for about 10 weeks and each episode would leave you waiting for the next week when you would want to see if "our side" had got out of the trap. These trips to the pictures cost us 2d<sup>th</sup>. and we had to run errands to earn the money. I liked it when my brother took me, as he would have me on his back and I'd get in for a 1d and then we would have enough money to buy two ounces of mint balls. Whilst we were at the pictures my Mother would be making cakes, one big cake, rock cakes and some *Welsh cakes* which didn't last too long.

My Mom and Dad had 4 children, 3 boys and 1 girl. My 2 brothers were Leslie and Edward [Teddy] and my sister was called Margaret [Peggy]. I was the youngest and was known as the baby of the family, which I hated but kept quiet about it and it died a death after a while and I was glad of that. At the time of typing this, (1<sup>st</sup> November 1998), only my sister and myself are around, and my sister has just had her 76<sup>th</sup> birthday on October 20 and I shall have my 75<sup>th</sup> on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December. My Mother's birthday was on December 5<sup>th</sup> so I was a late birthday present for her. Ours was a very happy family in a very happy street.

I was in a gang and I can recall one of the things our gang done and that was to get an old bicycle frame and some old wheels, a bit of rag sufficed for a saddle, fitted it all up and took it in turns to go down the hill. It was safe enough as there were not many cars about then, mostly horse and carts up the street in those days. There was an incident the other day that transported me way back and that was a hearse, a black carriage with glass all around being drawn by two magnificent big black horses with black plumes on their heads. They had a wild look about them, they looked so

powerful and majestic, almost out of place, it was as if they should have been running about free on some American Plain.

I used to sing in the choir of St. Mary's church along with Roy and Lynn Clements and John Slade. It used to be church on Sunday morning, Sunday school in the afternoon, Evensong with choir practice on Tuesday night and evensong on Wednesday nights. We would do the occasional wedding and the occasional funeral, maybe getting 3d for the service. Each year we would have a choir outing going to places like Hereford Cathedral, Gloucester Cathedral, Bath and St. David's down in West Wales on the train. This was a treat on it's own so as you can imagine we had a great time. Again they were happy times.

When there was a wedding up the street us kids would be there when the happy couple would be getting into the wedding car ready to scramble for the halfpennies and pennies which the groom would throw out as was the custom. Another thing I can recall, is going down to the bottom of the street, to *Lang the Milk*, and this was served not in bottles like today, but straight from the churn, and if this was in one of our very hot summers mom would have to boil the milk to stop it from going off. Normally my mother had the milk from the Co-op milkman and this was served from a great big milk churn, which was mounted on two large wheels. There was a tap on the churn and the milk was measured out in ½ and 1 pint jugs.

The Co-op also delivered the bread to the door via the horse and cart and my mother would pay by Co-op money tokens, which were purchased from the grocery department, when my brother and I would go to on a Friday evening and a Saturday morning. We also got the groceries for two other women, a Mrs Phillips and a Mrs Howe, getting the princely sum of 3d and 4d which we really earned. In those days the shops used to pack all groceries into large brown paper bags and the weekly buy could be quite heavy. Sugar was sold loose and weighed up as to how much you wanted and the butter was patted into whatever size you required shaped by using 2 butter pats which were shaped like small cricket bats. The assistants served from behind a wooden counter so you had to point to whatever you wanted. You were given a Co-op membership number and received a certain amount of dividend each year, based on purchases made throughout a period of time.

One thing I must write is that in Llewellyn St., at the time when I was a youngster, we only had gas light and this meant that when we wanted to light one, you would have to hold a match to the mantle and turn the gas on and wait for ignition but being careful that you did not touch the mantle

as they were very flimsy. The mantle was like a cup shaped cotton mesh and at the slightest touch it would disintegrate so we would always let Dad do it as if anything happened he would have to pay for a new one.

Having no electricity meant we had to have a battery operated “*Wireless*” which comprised of one large dry cell battery and a wet cell accumulator. The accumulator had to be recharged every week so it was policy to have 2 and then you were never without the company of the “*Wireless*”. If you did not want to miss the start of any programme you had to switch on at least a minute or so before it started to give the *valves* a chance to warm up. There were some very good programmes in those days, varieties, dramas and shows you could write up and take part in a competition. Nowadays you only have to switch on the radio and get instant response.

I am very disappointed at the quality of the programmes today, with everything seeming to be geared to the younger people. There is no variety and I am sure that people would like more of it. You only had to look at how the “Palace of Variety” went with all people, young and old alike. We had no T.V., as that was unheard of then, but we used to have what was then known as “*The Magic Lantern*” which was a series of slides projected on to a screen with a person talking as the slide was shown. This was usually shown by the “*Toc H*”. I am not too sure if this was a religious body or not.

On the cold wet miserable nights we used to do jigsaw puzzles or play cards, “Ludo” or my favourite game of “Monopoly”. I miss those days although the wife, Elsie, and I still have a game of “Scrabble”, cards or “Ludo”. It was better with the children that is why we enjoy the company of our grandchildren occasionally and get the old games out. TV can be boring if on all of the time. The wife and I select our programmes and then either play a game or I will read and the wife will do her “*Wordsearch*” book, which she enjoys. I do enjoy a good book and lose myself in the story, any sort of story providing it can hold my interest and now I have another interest, which is this laptop computer, on which I am having a go at putting some of my memories together. Our son Alan, coaxed me to give the computer a try with the hope of getting me interested in going on and having “email” installed to keep in touch with the 4 grandchildren who were, at the time I wrote this, at 3 different Universities, Stafford University for Kirsty and Gareth, Keele University for Samantha, and Wrexham University for Louise.

Now to get back to the Twenties and Thirties and the topic of hair styles. The first was a three penny haircut, which was short back and sides, or a four penny haircut which was styled a bit neater and you were a bit more fussy because you were starting to date a girl and wanted to create an impression. All that changed when you were called up for the armed forces whether it was the Army, Navy or the Air Force, you had no choice, it was a case of short, short back and sides. A question of cleanliness really but it did upset some people.

On the travel side, there were buses and trains. I always enjoyed a trip on the railway and being my Father was an employee of the *Great Western Railway*, the *GWR*, he was entitled to 4 free passes per year for himself and all members of the family below the age of 14 years. Every year we, Mom, Dad, Peg and I would go to London or Weston Super Mare for a day or maybe go to Guildford to my Mother's sister, Aunt Vic, and Uncle Ted and our cousin Peggy for a week and really enjoy ourselves. The highlight was the trip on the train and as it was going along we'd put our head out of the window and more often than not we would get a bit of coal dust in our eye. Even now, although the trains are not the same I still get a kick out of riding on one but I feel really privileged to have had the joy of the steam train and nothing can take that away from me.

Just after the war started I joined the Port Talbot branch of the ATC [Air Training Corps] and got my first flight, which was in a Whitley bomber, based at Stormy Down, Pyle. The plane was nicknamed the flying coffin because of its box like shape. It was slow and ponderous but quite safe and unknown to me at the time I was to work on them for quite a while when I went into the Air Force proper. I was stationed at what was then Ringway Airport, No 1 Parachute school where the Army had their Paratroopers trained. I think it was 7 drops from the aircraft and 1 or 2 from a balloon, also some night drops. Ringway is now Manchester Airport. In those days Fairey and Avro had places on the other side of the aerodrome and the noise from the "Fairey Barracuda" was something you didn't want to hear too often as it would not have done your ear drums a lot of good. Maybe that was the purpose of it, to strike fear into the enemy. I found the people of Manchester a very friendly bunch and enjoyed my short stay there but lost one of my workmates there, Dick Napierela, and it was said he had fallen off the wing of one of the planes and we never found out any more. Ringway was mostly filled with personnel from around Manchester, a sort of compassionate posting place. There was only three of us airmen sleeping in a billet which normally would have slept about 30 bodies so you can understand why we booked the beds nearest the old tortoise stove, these stoves were not the easiest things to get going but once well alight they gave out a good heat whether with coal or coke. Coke is coal from which gas has been expelled.

As I mentioned at the start, memories do not come in any tidy order but mostly when something happens and you think “I remember when things were a bit different to that” such as when I first came to dear old “*Brum*” (Birmingham, for the uninitiated) and saw for the first time a tramcar. These ran on rails down the centre of the road, from the top of the tram there was a pole with a pulley on the end and this ran along an electric cable which in turn worked a motor and gave a fair rate of speed. When the weather was foggy the tram was ideal, the only thing you had to watch out for was crossing the road when you got off. In the tram you had a driver and a conductor, the same as on the buses and when the tram stopped at a stop people got on and some got off and then the conductor pulled on a cord, a bell would ring in the driver’s cabin and off we’d go. Now on some of these trams there were wooden seats and over the years the seats had got a good polish on so you tended to slide all over the place. If this happened to take you unawares it tended to startle you for a moment, but I enjoyed riding on them. Then along came the double decker bus, stairs at the back of the bus to take you to the top deck and of course there was still the conductor to take the fares and issue you with your ticket, the farther you went the more the ticket cost. I remember when Elsie and I took Alan and Gillian on the bus and went up stairs, they couldn’t understand why there wasn’t a driver, so if the front seat was vacant we would sit there and let Alan think he was the driver. Now we have the one man operated bus, single and double decker, both supposed to be non smoker but you have to have the yobbo who has to go against the rules. In Brum and the West Midlands all of us Pensioners have a good deal regards travelling, from 9-30am to 3-30pm and then from 6-00pm to 11-30pm, as we have free travel on all buses and can use the local trains all day, and at week-ends we can use the buses all day.

Another thing that strikes me today is the lack of Policemen walking the beat. This is probably the sign of how society has changed over the years. Maybe it isn’t as safe as it was in my day as a youngster as if you had occasion for a Policeman to talk to you, because you had done something wrong no matter how trivial, you took notice. I remember once when two Policemen stopped me on a dark night riding my bike without any lights, they were big chaps, over 6ft tall, which they had to be in those days and over 15 stone in weight and me about 5ft.nothing and about 8 stone wringing wet. Mind you, I had recognised them as 2 Welsh rugby players whom I had great respect for; their names were Arthur Basset and Mog Hopkins, Arthur later went on to play for Cardiff Rugby Club. Playing for one of the fashionable clubs even in those days as now, meant you had a better chance of being picked for the National side and that meant everything. Just after I came back from the RAF and went back working in D. W. Jones, the printers, one of my mates got me a job as turnstyle operator at Aberavon Rugby Club. It was a good little job as it got me about 7/6

extra cash per game plus a free 2<sup>nd</sup> half viewing, sitting in the stand with the business people and speaking to some of the great players. Funny really, because now I realise that they were no different to anybody else. It's us, the public, who puts them on a pedestal and make them into some sort of icon. They are only doing a job of work like you or I but get a hell of a sight more money doing it, especially today and it is still the same - *"If your face fits"!*

Now the cold weather is once more upon us it reminds me of my mother polishing up the old cast iron fireplace with *Black Lead* polish, creating a beautiful shine. Next, she would lay the fire, first putting some screwed up newspaper in the fire basket with half a dozen or so pieces of firewood, then the cinders of the previous night's fire, put the blower up which assisted in creating more draught where you wanted it and "hey presto" it was all systems go. Once that was going nicely you put more coal on. The next thing then was whitening the hearth, polishing the fender and then think of getting breakfast and us kids off to school. Mondays were washdays and on those days the "Copper"<sup>c</sup> had to be got ready, where a fire was started under the copper to heat the water ready to boil the white wash. The copper took quite a few gallons so it was a while before the water became hot enough to do the white wash. When the wash had been done it was swilled out in clean water and then rinsed in "blue" for that extra whiteness before being pegged out on the line to dry. Tuesday was ironing day and this entailed heating the flat iron on the fire, when hot enough it was wiped with a cloth and ironing could begin and all things were ironed in those days. Eventually my mother had a gas heated iron and that was a godsend, much cleaner and so much quicker. On another day she would take up the mats or rugs, put them over the line and give them a beating to get any dust out but the stair runner was a different thing altogether. All the stair rods had to be taken out of their little slots and "Brassoed" then all put back. Life was much harder for the women in those days. My mother had spent a lot of her young life in service so it was a shame that she hadn't lived to see the Television series of *"Upstairs, Downstairs"* as that was just like it was in her days. She would have enjoyed that.

Another thing I can remember before the "Clean Air" act became law was coming back to Birmingham after spending a holiday at Weston-Super-Mare. Our friend had driven us to our holiday flat situated in Atlantic Road. We were on a hill, which was a bit of a drag but well worth it, as the flat was light and clean and definitely the best home from home we could have wished for. The friend and his youngest daughter stayed the night and left the next day to go home, he was coming the next Saturday to take us back home. We really enjoyed our week, naturally this went by too quickly and we felt rather reluctant but things can't last forever. We bid our landlady, Mrs Mackenzie, goodbye and had our last few hours enjoying a boat trip around the bay with Stan

Widdowson and his daughter Susan before setting off home in his Austin “Cambridge”. About 10 miles from Birmingham we could see this dirty big cloud of filthy smoke actually hanging over the city and I must say it made us all realise how industrially dirty the air was that we were living in. It was little wonder that the people suffered from a lot of chest problems. Many years later it transpired that my wife Elsie was suffering with asthma, the same as thousands of other people. It was a step in the right direction when the Government of the day decided to clean up the pollution

It is now December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1998 and Christmas has been and gone. One wonders if the true meaning of Christmas day is remembered as it should be, or whether it is just a case of the giving and receiving of presents and gorging food and drink until your shirt buttons pop off. Elsie and myself enjoyed ourselves, we spent Christmas day with Gillian and her family and then on Boxing Day we went over to Alan and Mary’s and family, not forgetting Scamp the dog. On both days we played games such as “UNO”, “Chase the Ace” and “Trivial Pursuit”. Elsie and I do enjoy playing games, especially being more than two, as it’s more fun. We left both homes at about 6p.m. as they were both good enough to give us a lift and if they wanted to have a drink the evening was still young enough. It’s amazing how times have changed, maybe because there is such a variety of things one can buy youngsters today as opposed to the small range of things available 60 odd years ago. The most we could expect was a Jigsaw, a book, a torch, a 2/6 Selection Box and maybe a clockwork train that chugged around on a circle of metal rails about 18” in diameter or a clockwork car plus Nuts, Tangerine, Orange, Apple and a new Halfpenny. Next thing then was to see your friends to see what they had had, usually they had also had a Jigsaw puzzle, so it was a case of seeing where we were the least bother and doing the puzzles one at a time. In those days Woolworths was a “Nothing over 6d store” and it was surprising what you could get, especially to stretch out the Christmas toy budget. As kids our gang would go to Woolworth’s and get a 6d. sea fishing line which comprised of a foot of Gut with three or four hooks, a lead weight and about 20ft. of line then go up to George Richards the Fishmonger and buy a pennyworth of Cockles then speed down to the beach, get on the wooden pier and fish for Whiting which used to be pretty good when the tide was coming in. We would not tell our Mothers where we were going being we were banned from the pier as there were planks of wood missing.

Now we go on, on how the old custom of “First Footing” used to be, at midnight a person, usually a friend of the family would call with a piece of coal which was said “would bring you luck all year”. He or she would then join you for a drink and drink each other’s health. Then you would visit your friend and do the same. After a while you felt quite happy. There is a lot to say for the old customs but it seems that a lot of them are now dying out, more the pity. Us kids next morning

would then go around the people in the street, wish them “*Happy New Year*” and get what fruit they had left over from Christmas, some sweets or maybe a halfpenny. It used to be quite profitable really. By the time 12 o’clock came I had enough money to last the week, also apples and oranges etc., but when you think about it, it only replenished what had gone out of the parents fruit bowl with others doing exactly what you had done. Talking of fruit a couple of us lads used to go down to the docks and see the great big white banana boats come in, dazzling white they were, and some of the biggest ships we used to see in Port Talbot Docks.

The next holiday was March 1<sup>st</sup>, St. David’s day and on that day we celebrated the Saint’s day by wearing either a Daffodil or a Leek, the girls wore the Daffodil and the lads the Leek. The lads usually had a packet of salt handy to eat the Leeks as the morning went on and the classroom smelt like a Pickle factory but come the dinner time we were allowed home for the rest of the day. Talking of Pickle Factory takes me back to when I was a kid, Dad would be on afternoons and if it was just Mom and I for dinner I would pop down to the Pickle Factory and get either Pickle Onions or Piccalilli with a big pudding basin in my hand just in case our Leslie’s girl friend would serve me, because if she did the basin was filled but if not we had to be content with it half full, not too bad being we were only charged 2d.

Good Friday was the next holiday and being in the choir meant going to church, but we didn’t have to go for the full 3hour service in the afternoon. Everywhere was closed as if it was a Sunday. Easter Saturday was a normal day and in the afternoon we would go and watch Aberavon play Neath at Rugby, which was usually a needle match and needed a top no-nonsense Referee to take charge of the match. Sunday was the day we 4 kids had an Easter Egg then after breakfast I was once again off to church and the same after tea with Sunday School in between.

Whitsun was the next holiday, 7 weeks after Easter. On the Monday we would have the Church Whitsun treat, the Sunday School members would meet at the Church and parade down to a field by the local hospital and there we would have all sorts of games and sports, mind you, there always seemed to be more than the usual number of Sunday School members there even though we would join up with members of St. Paul’s Church. Just like the Aberavon v Neath match, there was a certain rivalry between St. Mary’s and St. Paul’s, of course, being unbiased, St. Mary’s was the crème a la crème. Our church was Norman style with a bell tower, the bells were rung every Sunday and Wednesday and any other special events day. When the games were over we were treated to a tea party and “Seed”<sup>d</sup> cake was always on the menu, my favourite and also a favourite of my Mother, so a piece or two always found it’s way into my pocket to take home.

Each year Dad would have a week's holiday and we would occasionally go to Mother's sister at Guildford in Surrey, my Aunt Vic, Uncle Ted and cousin Peggy. It was a nice change as they lived right by the village green way out in the country and at the end of the row of houses was a little sweet shop where I used to buy some Bulls eyes, Black and White striped round minty flavoured gobstoppers, lovely! It was quite a long journey but enjoyable as it was on the old steam train. We used to change trains at London and that used to take 4 and a half hours from Port Talbot then another train to Guildford. Another trip we used to enjoy was a day out in London. One incident stands out in my mind and that was having dinner at Joe Lyons, the "corner shop" Restaurant and when asked by the waitress what I wanted for sweet I replied "Licorice Allsorts", the age of innocence. I don't know why I remembered that so vividly unless I had to take some ribbing over the mistake. When the time came to go back home Dad would buy some bread and cheese for us to eat on the train before we all tried to have a sleep. We would all arrive home and more or less fall into bed tired out but contented.

On some Saturday afternoons in the summer when Dad had finished work he and I would go to see the Aberavon Tinplate Works Cricket X1 play a match at their ground at the Sandfields. They were quite a good side and very entertaining but the match that highlighted their season was the fixture with Glamorgan. I can recall Cyril Smart, the opener for Glamorgan, on a couple of occasions breaking a window of the house nearest to the ground, a brilliant hitter of the ball and every watchers favourite. On many occasions when Dad was not too busy doing secretarial work for the local Labour Party he would come and join a few of us lads in the lane for a knock about with the bat and ball, mostly as a spin bowler, which he was pretty good at.

I cannot remember if I mentioned earlier that my Father, as a young man worked as a Steward on the "Peninsular" and "Orient" Royal mail ship "MALWA". In the lads bedroom at home there used to be a photograph of the ship set in a frame in the shape of a lifebelt, my sister now has this picture at her home. In the early hours of one morning last week for no apparent reason I started thinking about my Father's seafaring days and about how he once told Elsie and myself about how he was on the Australian run.

I must also pull my finger out and write to the Borough Surveyor of Port Talbot and see if he can oblige me with some pictures of the old Mountain School, the beach as it was when we were kids, the old Market Hall and the Docks. Writing this I can see it all as it was and almost smell the clean sea air and see the town from up the mountain. Why do things have to change? Is it always for the

best? We of my era have so many more things to look back on and yet the youngsters of today have more chance of getting a better education at Universities to get them better equipped for the High Tech jobs of today. Things are so sophisticated and so advanced, even this Laptop computer I am using to do this life story on is an amazing piece of technology, it never ceases to amaze me.

Another thing that has just occurred to me is that in my younger days we were never inundated with a load of unwanted junk mail as we are today. It was only reported in the press this week that about 60% of all mail delivered by the postman is made up of junk mail. Another thing was we never had any graffiti painted all over any wall space that was blank.

There wasn't much to remember before I started school except for one faint recollection of being put in a big pram with my sister, sitting up facing each other. The pram had a well in the middle so as when we were bigger my sister and I could sit up with our feet down in the well. The pram had 4 big wheels and was quite high up, much easier for the moms to put us in and out. When I was either 5 or as near as damn it I started school at the Aberavon Mountain Infants School and that was really the start of my life as I know it. People said it then and they say it today that school is the best part of your life and it really applied to me as it did the rest of the family. It was called the Mountain School because it was built on the side of a mountain and once you moved on to the higher senior school you went farther up the mountain and it was a steep climb up especially if you were a bit late and had to rush. I suppose we had about a half mile walk to get to school and had to cross the busy main road, at school times a policeman would be on duty to see all us kids safely across and the same again at going home time and it was not too long after I started school that the then Minister of Transport, the Right Honourable Hoare Belisha thought of the Belisha Beacon Crossing as we have it today and that meant no more policeman to see us across the road.

What I remember of lessons in my first months at school were having small cards with letters on and we had to hold up these cards when teacher asked us to show a certain letter and the same applied with numbers, that was how we learned to spell and count. The teachers I can remember are Miss Edwards, Miss Jenkins and Miss Lewis. All the lady teachers in those days were single women, married women were not allowed, if this was the same in England I cannot say. I will always remember Miss Lewis as she always had her hair in thin plaits wound like earphones around her ears and she would cycle to school on her big 28in wheel sit up and beg bicycle which had a cord screen half way down the back wheel to stop her long skirt being caught. To see anything like that today would raise a few eyebrows.

The day eventually came when I moved up to the higher school, where we had men teachers, and the ones I can recall are Mr Thomas, Mr Harris, Mr Rees and Mr Lewis. The senior school was an all boys school. The girls were in the school in the next building adjoining the boys school and I believe to this day that this is the better way, boys and girls separate, that way there are not so many distractions! Mr Thomas was a tall man, he was strict but fair and you knew how far you could go with him. Mr Harris, Dai we called him when he couldn't hear us, was a red head and had a temper associated with red haired people, and his favourite topic was telling us stories of "*Blackshirt*", the likeable rogue and I must say he used to hold us spellbound. Mr Rees was a different character, quietly spoken and more senior in years, where his specialised subject was Science although he did also take us in Maths. The Maths he taught us was prior to our sitting the 11plus examination, which you needed to pass to go on to Grammar School. I am afraid that my brother Ted was the only one to achieve this distinction in our family.

Ted went on to the "County Grammar" and from there he went on to work with our Uncle Ted, who was a Painter and Decorator up in Guildford, Surrey. He was there for a while then moved on to work at the "Dennis Motor" factory where they made the Fire Engines of that period. Ted went away to work, as it was not easy to find work in Port Talbot before the war (1939-1945). He left the "Dennis Motor" Factory to join the Glamorgan Constabulary at the age of 18 and was stationed in Maesteg, prior to being called up. Ted was a Corporal in the REME and was in France as part of the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF). Like a number of Army Service Personnel he was evacuated from Dunkirk in May / June 1940. Post demob he went back to the Police Force, serving in a number of locations including Porthcawl, North Cornelli, Aberdare, where he took part in the rescue efforts during the Aberfan Disaster in 1965, and, of course, Port Talbot. He then retired from the Police force in c.1967 to work in the Personnel Department in the Steel Company of Wales (SCoW) works in Margam, then became Security Sergeant, again within the SCoW, whilst living in Newton, Portcawl.

I stayed on at school until I was 14years 8months old as there were no jobs available offering an apprenticeship. Eventually an apprentice was needed at D W Jones, the printers. The headmaster came and told me to go home and get my Father to take me to see about the job, where I was successful and started on August the 22<sup>nd</sup> 1938. By coincidence, this date happened to be Mom and Dad's wedding anniversary and it was also the time when I had my first long trousers, as in those days you only had long trousers when you left school. The first thing I noticed on starting work was the hours, 8-30am-6.00pm with 1hour for lunch. It took a while to adapt especially working all these hours for 8 shillings and 4d per week. My pocket money at the end of the week was 6d. (In today's money that was 2½ pence.) It would be another 12 months before an increase was due and

that was only another 4 shillings. I was signed as an apprentice and the period was for 7 years. Today the training period is 3 years, 1 complete year at Printing College, 2 years in industry and then you are qualified. Looking back makes one realise we were still emerging from the slave labour days. I wonder what would have happened if the 1939/45 war had not come about.

My sixpence pocket money went a fair old way because in those days you could buy 2 pennyworth of chips and go to the pictures for 3d, leaving 1d for sweets or, if you preferred, an ice cream wafer. To implement my pocket money I still went to the Co-op for the 2 ladies, a Mr Phillips and Mr Howe on a Saturday morning so that meant I had another 7d which more than doubled my income. All of us lads in the street still went about as we did when we were in school, we still played rugby and cricket in the street it was easier then as there was hardly any motor transport, mostly horse and cart traffic. The Baker, the Milkman and the Vegetable man all used the horse and cart. The one exception was the Co-op Milkman who served his milk from a big Churn mounted on 2 large wheels and he served the milk using a half pint and a pint measure. The Baker and the Milkman were paid with tokens which were purchased from the Co-op when you bought your groceries.

When all of us lads had finished school and all more or less at work we decided to buy Cricket kit and formed the Llewellyn Street Cricket Team and challenged other lads to a match and we used to play on the "warren" just before you came to the beach. The warren is now a large housing estate and a Chemical Plant. On Sundays we would all go down to the beach calling in at "Antolin's" Ice Cream Parlour and having a cooler (Ice cream in lemonade) and maybe chatting up some of the girls that were about. Some of the lads were of the age when the interest of girls was beginning to make itself shown which I suppose on reflection was inevitable. We did say that girls would not split us up but slowly the gang got smaller and as we became interested in girls we all seemed to go our different ways but we did still meet up but not so frequently.

I met Elsie when I was about 16 years old and we started going out with each other and needless to say we got married. Elsie worked as a waitress in the 'Walnut Tree' Hotel which was situated at the top end of Water St. and of a night-time I would go up to the dining room and wait for her to finish serving her customers. We would then probably manage to have an hour together before I had to go home as my Dad expected us kids home at 10pm - no later. We used to be glad when Dad was on the afternoon shift as that meant he had to leave home before we had to be home so we could hang it out a bit longer, but not too long as Mom would not tell lies to cover up for us. When the war started Mom used to be on pins if we were not at home when the air raid siren wailed out it's mournful tune, if you could call it that.

On the night when Elsie was off duty we invariably went to the cinema, either the 'Plaza' or the 'Majestic', the 'Majestic' was our favourite, in those days we were able to go up stairs, sit in the back row and have a good snog. We used to have some good films, at the start every film was in black and white and then came the colour films and I think the first colour film we saw was 'Babes in Arms' with Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland at the 'Plaza'. I can vaguely recollect seeing a few silent films and then the 'Talkies' as we called them, came with Al Jonson.

We also had a cinema called the 'Empire' and the ironic thing about that cinema was, it was showing 'The Firefly' with Alan Jones and one night after the last performance it caught fire and never opened up again. We also had 4 other cinemas, there was the 'Grand', 'Capitol', 'Palace' and the Taibach Picture house, affectionately known as the Flea pit. There was never the quantity of actors and actresses as we have today but what there were, were good. We had Bogart and Cagney and Edward G. Robinson, who were the main baddies and then the goodies such as Don Ameche and Franchot Tone, Fred MacMurray and Dana Andrews and we must not forget Errol Flynn, the swash buckling hero of all the lads.

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*Endnotes*

<sup>b</sup> 12 Old pence (12d) were the equivalent of 5pence in today's monies

<sup>c</sup> A Copper was a big copper container that the water was heated in, similar to a hot water tank today.

<sup>d</sup> Seed Cake – otherwise known as a Caraway seed cake, a recipe for which can be found in the recipe section

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***Please Note!***

On Christmas Day, 2004, Gordon died whilst in The Warren Pearl Hospice, Solihull, as a result of his illness, [Cryptogenic Fibrosing Alveolitis \(CFA\)](#), diagnosed back in 1996.

At some time in the future, it is hoped to expand this article to include his later life.

Alan.