A Hyson Green Guttersnipe

Joan Fulford

Published by Clifford W Fulford & City Linux

Memoirs of a Hyson Green Guttersnipe

JOAN MARY FULFORD

Memoirs of a Hyson Green Guttersnipe

The autobiography of Joan Mary Fulford. Born in Hyson Green, Nottingham in 1926. Chemist, librarian, teacher, writer and mother. Died at Adbolton Hall Norsing home, August 2013. A guttersnipe still.

CHAPTER 1.

1926 & Early Childhood

Rochdale terrace! I forget a great many names and places now but I remember the place I was born although it was demolished many years ago. It should have gone in the slum clearance in the early thirties. The tenants were moved out and the houses boarded up but the council changed its mind and relet the properties to folk on their waiting list. Later they were sold to sitting tenants who made a nice profit when they were finally demolished in the fifties.

Rochdale Terrace, with a name like that it should have been in Lancashire instead of Hyson Green, Nottingham. The terrace was a row of two up two down back-to-back houses off Randall Street.[1] The street ran down to Radford Road the main shopping area known as 'the green' by the locals. It was years before I learnt its proper name though why it was called 'the green' is a mystery since it had neither trees nor lawns.

There were six houses sharing the terrace yard, each had a cold water tap in the scullery and a black fire range with an oven in the living room. Water was heated in a kettle on the fire.

The terrace had a shared yard with a brick floor and each house was occupied by one of Mam's family. We didn't have a front door for what should have been the front was another terrace. These houses were raised above ours and their yard was paved with blue bricks.

At the bottom of the terrace stood the row of lavatories and the coal sheds. The lavatories were the flush type operated by a metal chain with a ring handle. The door opened outwards. I remember because I sat on the wooden seat to have a tooth pulled by one of my cousins.

[1] Joan's birth certificate shows that Rochdale Terrace was in Kirkstead Street which ran between Radford Road and Birkin Avenue. The stub of Kirkstead Street that junctions with Radford Road is still there. Randall Street is off Craven Road which junctions with Birkin Avenue. Joan has I think misremembered this one. There is a photographs of Kirkstead street available at "http://www.picturethepast.org.uk/frontend.php?keywords=Ref_No_increment;EQUALS;NTGM012626". The ends or the terraces are visible and Rochdale Terrace is the last one on the right.

It was hot in the terrace yard, not sunny, just hot and heavy. My tooth had been wobbly for a day or so and Vera persuaded me to let her pull it out. She said it might come out when I was asleep and choke me. So I sat on the lavatory being careful not to wriggle and catch my cheek in the crack in the wooden seat and at the same time holding tight lest I fell in.

Vera fastened a piece of thread round my tooth, tied it to the door latch and then she opened the door suddenly and out came the tooth. It was only a baby tooth but I remember feeling very proud of myself.

I couldn't wait to tell my brother when he came home from school. He wasn't impressed but he gave me his rag hanky to wrap it in. My cousin said if I put the tooth under my pillow the fairies would take it to build their ivory castles and leave me a joey (threpenny bit). Harry said she shouldn't tell me such rubbish but I decided to try it any way.

We played until Mam came home. She cut thick slices of bread from the loaf she had bought and spread it with plum jam. We sat on the doorstep to eat it and washed it down with water. 'Corporation lemonade' Dad called it. Some of our cousins joined us and we played until I was called in for bed.

Mam sat me on the copper top to undress me and wash my hands and face. I hated being washed. The cold wet flannel - an old piece of towel - made my face sore and left my neck wet and the yellow bar of soap often had scratchy bits picked up from the scrubbing brush. Sometimes I stood in the big yellow stone sink to be washed down.

I almost died at the age of two, but for the intervention of Aunt Cis I almost certainly would for Mam thought I was teething but my Aunt said she could smell the fever. Despite my mother's protests she fetched the doctor saying she would pay. There was no free health service then.

The doctor told Mam he didn't think there was anything seriously wrong but he took a swab from my throat. Mam said he came running up the street with the result and I was taken into the City isolation hospital.

I wasn't allowed any visitors; all they could do was look at me through a glass window. The first time Mam visited I caught sight of her and cried to go to her. She didn't visit again so by the time I came home the family were all strangers to me.

Throughout my childhood I had a terror of hospitals. I remember having a rubber ball clamped over my face and of fighting the nurses who held me down. I remember being slapped.PP

Harry, my brother was born, at Momma's house, nine months and two days after my parents wedding. Harry once joked, "You cut it fine." I thought Dad would hit him.

Mam and Dad married on August Bank holiday Monday 1922 as both worked a six day week and there were no paid holidays.

My brother Harry was three years older than me. Mam said he was so distorted by the forceps used in delivery that my father's first cry on seeing him was, 'My God have I got to take that through life with me.' Mam never let him forget those words. Fortunately, the baby's eye, which according to Dad was in the middle of his forehead and his mouth that was pulled across his cheek, assumed their normal place in a short time although he never had much sight in his left eye.

By 1926 the year of the National Strike, the birth of our present Queen Elizabeth and me Mam and Dad had moved to Rochdale terrace.

I can't remember a time when I didn't know about the historical events. The first because Mam told us that Dad was at a midnight union mass meeting whilst I was being born, the second because there was an annual family argument as to whether I was born before or after midnight. Momma (my maternal grandmother) swore she heard a clock strike midnight before I was delivered which meant I shared the birthday of the then princess Elizabeth.

The doctor judged the time by the clock over Staddon's, a local drapery store[2]; she put my birthday as the 20 April 1926. The argument suggests no one had a watch, nor did they have an alarm clock.

[2] Staddons, established in 1919 is, amazingly, still in business on Radford Road.

I remember the lamp lighter was paid to tap on the bedroom window with his rod to wake Dad up in time for work. Those were the days of gaslights spluttering on the streets and in the living rooms. The living room lights were high up on the wall. The gas was turned on and lit with a match or a taper lit from the fire. The flimsy net like mantle broke if it was touched.The bedrooms were lit with candles or would have been if we had been allowed them. Mam took us up to bed with a candle but never left it.

During early childhood Harry was diagnosed as having a lazy eye. He was compelled to wear a shade over his good eye in the mistaken belief it would rectify the lack of vision in his left eye. Poor lad constantly bumped into things, and suffered the torments of school-fellows who called him 'boz eye,' which perhaps accounts for him being a quiet timid child -the very opposite from me.

I was a forceps delivery too and the third baby my Mam had in three years of marriage. The second child was still born. It was unusual, in those days for working class women to have a doctor in attendance. They could ill afford the cost and so she suffered prolonged labour until the local nurse, midwife, layer out of the dead, insisted the doctor be called. All three births were forceps deliveries..PP Cis was my mother's eldest brother's wife. She was a cut above the rest she didn't have a Nottingham accent and her house was always neat and tidy. She had two children the eldest, a boy named John after his father, was called Son or Sonny and I was in my thirties before I knew his name was John. His sister was several years younger. Her name was Vera. She was a thin anaemic looking child the very opposite of her dark sturdy brother.

Mam and her sisters must have been bitchy about Aunt Cis otherwise I wouldn't have overheard the conversation that made me ask her, "Is it true Auntie Cis that you dye your hair?" That put an end to my welcome in that house and earned me a walloping from Mam.

Aunt Vi, Mam's younger sister, thought it hilarious. "Must be true or she wouldn't be so mad", she said.

Aunt Vi was my favourite Aunt, she found everything funny and she was never cross. She wasn't like Mam in looks either; she was quite skinny whilst Mam was dumpy.

Two of Mam's sisters and two brothers and their families lived in the terrace and so my playmates were my cousins. Aunt Rose, Mam's eldest sister, had three sons, later she had three girls. The lads were always fighting.

Dad made me a swing with a piece of clothes line fastened to the lavatory doorjambs. We took turns in swinging, and pushes had to be delivered face on. We couldn't have swung very high for there wasn't room but at the time I thought I was reaching the sky.

We played with marbles made of brown clay and with cigarette cards that were given free in packets of cigarettes. All the men smoked Woodbines, Players or home rolled cigarettes but none of the women smoked.

We flicked the cards at a line of cards arranged against the wall. There were lots of quarrels with the losers shouting "Cheat". No one was completely bankrupted since if anyone lost their all, the others would offer one marble or card each to get them going again. I was never as generous when I played with outsiders.

Marbles were flicked with the bent first finger, the object being to hit the opponent's ball. Later we cut gates in the side of a box and numbered them with the number of marbles won by any who got through. This game could win or lose the box owner a lot of marbles.

I think I was a difficult baby, given to tantrums and Mam had a very short fuse. Once when Mam was laying into me, one of my Aunts suggested she should put me in the coalhouse. By modern thinking this was dreadful but I was not too upset at the time, although later I did suffer a mild claustrophobia.

There was a pile of slack in the corner and a round hole in the coalhouse door through which light sprinkled black diamonds, but when I spread it on my dress it lost the glitter. When I was released I resembled Tom the chimney sweep and got another spanking.

I remember getting out into the road on a hot summer's day and popping tar bubbles that formed between the cobbles. They made a lovely pop when pressed. Mam went berserk when she found me as the tar had transferred itself from my fingers to my dress and hair. This experience served me well in later years. My

baby daughter did the same thing and I remembered that an aunt had removed the tar by plastering me with lard followed by washing with soft soap. The stains never came off my baby's dress though.

I was told, although I have no recollection of it, that on another occasion I was locked in the bedroom. There I deliberately smashed Mam's trinket set to pieces, severely cutting my hands in the process. "You shouldn't lock me up", I am reputed to have cried.

Both my brother and I were terrified of Dad and yet he had never hit me. I only saw him hit my brother once, that was when we had been squabbling and Mam riled him. We didn't see much of him for he worked shifts and spent his spare time on union business.

Mam and Dad quarrelled a lot, they didn't come to blows but loud shouting can be just as frightening. As a child I always blamed Mam but with hindsight I realise he was a difficult man to please. He wanted to break the influence of her sisters particularly of Aunt Vi who he thought was flighty and encouraged Mam to get into debt.

Dad was terrified of debt because his father had been a drunkard and as a child he had seen the bailiffs come and turn them out of their home. When Mum bought a dress from a mail order catalogue he was furious.

Mam told me that when I was born he locked her in so that her sisters couldn't come to look after her. He gave the key to his own sister who took the only egg in the house for herself.

Despite the rows the family rubbed along together. And when I was in trouble with Mam I could always run to an Auntie's house.

Clifford Ernest Allen - Dad
"A difficult man to please."

Mary Ann Jane Henrietta Russell - Mam
From a postcard to Cliff before they were married.

On summer evenings the whole family joined Momma and Granddad on their front door step. The street where they lived was horizontal to Randall Street and only three minutes walk away.

Beer was fetched, from the corner beer-off, in a big white jug with a golden scroll pattern under the lip. It was always one of the Aunts who fetched it and always with the instruction, 'Mek sure it wets your thumb.'

The men's talk was of politics. Grandad was a liberal and his sons agreed with him. Dad was a socialist and a bit of a tub-thumper. Sometimes they all got quite heated calling each other "bloody fools" and "silly boggers", but the quarrels were always political never personal.

The women made lemonade and jam sandwiches, wiped mouths and washed sticky fingers with a flannel. Sometimes they would scandalize about neighbours' behaviour.

"Have you heard he knocked her about last night",

"Well it's not surprising is it, the way she carries on? He came home to an empty house and no meal on the table."

Momma interrupted the flow. "You don't know. She is not a bad woman. You shouldn't say."

No one was ever bad where Momma was concerned.

Then the terrace was condemned and scheduled for slum clearance!

When we were split up, all my married Aunts and uncles went to the new council estate at Aspley. Dad refused to go into council property saying you weren't master of your own house in a council owned property.

My brother and I sat on the stairs listening to Mam and Dad rowing.

"We're not going."

"Oh going t' barricade the door, are you?"

"I didn't say we weren't moving. We'll get another house nearby."

"We've got to go. The Council have promised to keep us together."

"It's time you stood on your own two feet. And what about your Mam?"

"There'll be buses." Mam was sobbing now. "They've got baths and a garden."

Harry held my hand and we were both crying. I can't swear all the words were used on one occasion but they were certainly used over the weeks in between silences and the slamming of doors. We knew what they were talking about for the new houses had been a topic of conversation for months.

I was four or five when we moved to a house on the same street as Momma and Grandpa. The new house had a parlour, living room and scullery down stairs and four bedrooms on two flights upstairs. The lavatory was still in the back yard but it was our own. Coal was kept in the cellar, which had an iron grid on the street through which coal was delivered. We heard the clopping of the horse's hooves on the cobbles before we heard the cry of 'coal'.

I liked to watch the coal man heaving the sacks off the cart onto his back before tipping the contents down the cellar grate. I was told to count the sacks as he delivered them but when he had finished Mam came out to count them as they lay on the pavement.

We didn't have much furniture and Dad and Uncle Tom (Mam's younger brother) moved the furniture in a barrow. The sash bedroom widow was taken out to allow the wardrobe to be hauled through the window with ropes.

Although the move was only a short walk away I lost Aunts, Uncles, cousins and five open doors. My playground shrank from the communal terrace to a small back yard.

The house on Bateman Street was the same as Momma's except for the yard. Momma's yard had a low wall at the end whilst ours had a really high one and you couldn't see even the heads of anyone passing by in the entry. The wall was pillow shaped at the top and I often sat on it.

It's strange, I frequently heard the grown ups talk about "having your own front door", yet the house was never entered by that door which opened on to the street. Even when I was allowed out to sit on the front door step, I went and returned by the back door.

The only time I was allowed in the parlour was when I had been sitting astride one of the brick pillars at the bottom of the yard and feeling, what I imagined to be, cotton wool in my ear, (a normal condition for me) for I suffered reoccurring earache, I poked my finger in and was stung in the ear by a bee. On that occasion Dad was home he sucked out the sting and I was laid on the sofa to sleep off the trauma.

Try as I may I cannot recall anything else about the front room. I can't even remember details of the sofa. When I try the picture I get is of Momma's parlour.

The floors in the kitchen and scullery were red and blue quarry tiles. Dad wouldn't allow rag rugs like Momma had. He said they harboured the dust. When Mam scrubbed the floors no one was allowed to walk on them and she would lay old newspapers down to keep them clean. Dad bought the Daily Herald and apart from covering the floor they were used to cover the table and cut up into squares to hang on a nail in the lavatory. Those used on the table were saved to make into fire lighters.
.PP The fireplace was the same as the terrace, black iron with an oven but there was a gas cooking stove in the scullery. Dad made the fire every day before he went to work. He held a sheet of newspaper in front to make the fire draw. Often it would start to scorch and he would quickly push it into the fire.

Harry and I fetched the coal from the cellar. We held the bucket handle between us and lifted it a step at a time. When slack was wanted to back up the fire it was fetched up on a shovel.

Following the move from the terrace Mam had a nervous break down. She thought the walls were closing in on her. It wasn't really surprising for she missed her sisters, her health was poor and she made no friends amongst the neighbours. It didn't help that the house was bug ridden. They came out in the dark crawling up the bedroom walls. Dad burnt them off with a candle but still they came. Then we all had to stay out all day while sulphur was burnt in the

rooms. I think the bugs must have given up then.

Next-door was a widow who must have also suffered with nerves. The adjoining walls were thin and every sound could be heard. If we made any noise she would rap on the wall. Once Mam became hysterical banging on the wall and screaming.

This same neighbour threw a bucket of cold water over me, when I sat on the dividing wall. This made me slip and break my front tooth - a disfigurement that inhibited me from smiling in later years. Until I was in my forty's I was told that the tooth enamel was too thin to be repaired but a new lady dentist put a piece on. It is discoloured now but still there.

It was not surprising that Mam didn't neighbour for her family throughout her childhood were regarded as foreigners. When the eldest children began school they knew no English for although Granddad spoke English, Momma never mastered more than a few words and had never mixed with the neighbours. There was no outside help given but Granddad started to insist on the children speaking English when he was at home.

†[3]

Momma and Grandpa had emigrated from France in 1902, with them came their children Rose, John, Tom and my mother Mary age two. Later they had four more children, three were still at home when Mam and Dad married. The house had four bedrooms on two floors.

Grandpa said he was born aboard an English ship and so was able to claim British citizenship when he came here to work as a twist hand designer at Birkin's lace factory. I was able to verify the later part of this claim but not the circumstances of his birth. According to the records he was born in Calais.

Momma was small with kind grey eyes, she wore long back skirts and when she went out she put a shawl around her shoulders. Her hair, of which she was very proud, was a soft creamy white, crimped at the sides and fastened in the nape of her neck with

[3] In some copies of the original text Chapter 2 starts here.

"les cafards" translates as "the cockroaches".

hairpins. She always washed her hair with a washing powder called ’Compo’. She was the gentlest woman on God’s earth. She had ten children and only once smacked one of them, the youngest, after she had gone down to the ’Cut’ (canal) with some lads.

"Less, le pauvre chat"[4], Momma cried when Mam raised her hand to me. This I took to mean ’leave her alone.’ I was her "Petite chou-chou." Perhaps I looked like a cabbage! At any rate she was the most important person in my life and to my eternal regret I never told her I loved her.

She had some funny sayings, if I said; "I wish" she would laugh saying in broken English, "wish in one hand and shit in the other and see which gets full quickest."

Nothing made Momma cross not even when I wet myself while standing on a chair.

"Oh Momma", I cried. "What shall I do, I’ve peed mesen."

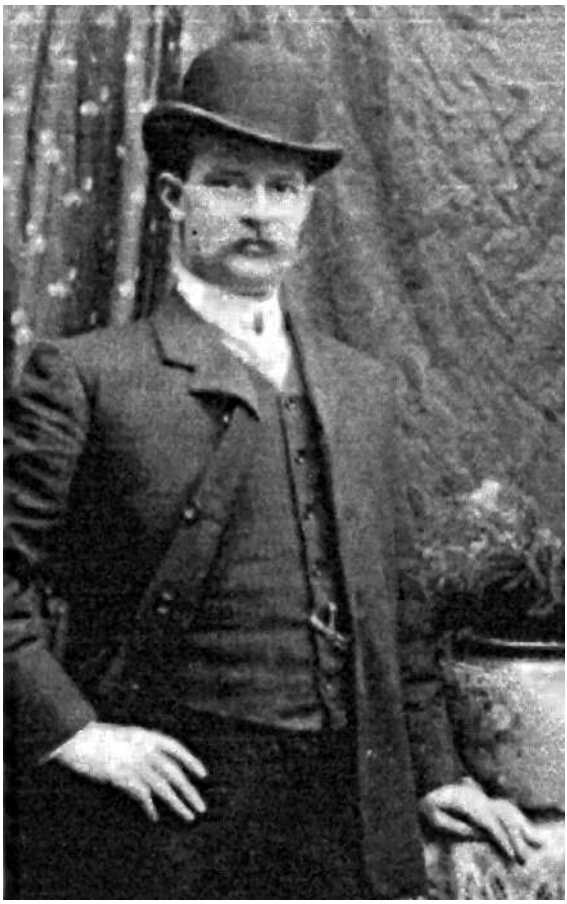
She laughed, "Shit in your hands and clap it to."

My terror at my lapse immediately dissolved in laughter and my knickers were rinsed and dried before Mam collected me.

Wetting the bed was another of my naughty ways. To make matters worse I claimed I dreamt I was on the pot (which I did) but Mam believed I was lying and was too idle to get out of bed.

Granddad wasn’t a very tall man but what he lacked in height he gained in character. He was a handsome man with a splendid moustache, waxed and twirled at the ends. He wore a gold Albert across his waistcoat and a shirt with a stiff winged collar. Although he spoke to Momma in French he addressed us in English rolling his ’Rs’ in a way that immediately identified him as a Frenchman.

[4] "le pauvre petite chat" is a French expression often translated as "poor little mite"



John Russell - Grandad

At meals he seemed to me to be surrounded by plates, one for meat, one for vegetables and one for bread. A jug of ale was on the table and Momma hovered about to fill his glass. Momma didn't drink but after the meal she would take coffee with him.

Granddad always drank beer with his meals and I often had a sup from his tankard. I liked the taste and so later refused to sign the pledge at Sunday School. My brother Harry didn't like it and so readily signed and sang 'My Drink is Water Bright,' with gusto. He

broke the pledge later though.

Granddad taught me to play fives and threes with ivory dominoes he had made himself. I still have some of them but alas not the full set. His cribbage board was also home made and the pegs were from the rib ends of an umbrella. When he was going out Momma would stand at the door with his bowler hat and coat and a clothes' brush.

He never did any menial tasks. The morning after giving birth Momma would leave her bed, light the fire, put the kettle on for his washing and shaving water and make breakfast.

No-one but Momma could cut a slice of bread for Granddad for it had to be so thin you could see the light through it and the butter had to be as thick as the bread.

Mam recalled that when she was a child Granddad would have six boiled eggs for breakfast. He gave his children the white tops and bottoms. In prosperous times he brought home his drinking partners to share oysters and cognac. Then he would have the children roused from their bed to display them with pride.

I don't remember sleeping at Momma's but I must have been there early in the mornings for I have vivid memories of watching Granddad shaving. A mirror hung by the kitchen window and next to it a leather strop. His razor blade was hidden in black ebony and opened up like an elongated penknife.

Momma mixed up the shaving solution in a mug and brought it to him foaming like white beer. Back and forth he stroked the gleaming blade on the strop before brushing the foam onto his cheeks. He caught sight of me staring and dabbed the brush in my open mouth. Why, I wondered, did he need a knife to scrape off the soap? He offered to use it on me once but Momma scolded him.

What memories I have of my early years are mostly centred on Aunt Alice and Momma's home. I have warm cosy memories of that house and a feeling that there, at least, I was loved.

Momma

I think we must have left the terrace before the other aunts moved for all the small fry were regularly left at Momma's. This must have been the period known as, 'The Hungry Thirties.' We had a slice of bread and lard for breakfast and Momma fed us dinner from the 'Pot au feu,' a cross between a soup and a stew ladled onto a slice of bread. The stew pot stood on the fire and never seemed to be emptied. Its constituents were mainly onions, haricot beans and a pig's trotter. We squabbled over who would get the bits of bone to suck.

Sometimes a pigeon would drop down the chimney and Momma would wring its neck, pluck and draw it before adding it to the pot.

My early memories are of Momma's living room overflowing with cousins. We were taught card games, snap, pairs, knockout whist, ace out and clock patience by Aunt Alice who was always at home. She was a big, raw-boned woman with fair hair and dressed in knitted suits. Her days were taken up knitting or mending stockings when she wasn't amusing her nephews and nieces.

Alice was an epileptic. She worked in a stocking factory from the age of fourteen but when she began to have fits her work mates petitioned the boss to sack her. He was reluctant to do this for she was the best stocking mender he had, however he had to yield in the end but for a long time he provided her with outwork.

I was fascinated by her skill as she picked up a ladder (run) with a fine hook. The final loop was darned in before she stroked the repair with the eye of the needle making it invisible.

Aunt Alice's fits grew worse as she got older and sometimes she would clutch the oilcloth on the table tearing it to shreds. Once she had hold no one could prise open her fingers.

Alice suffered the antagonism of the neighbours and said they wanted her put away. I suppose it was understandable that people seeing her in a fit should fear her for they were of the type described in the bible. Her face was contorted, her lips blue. She frothed at the mouth and thrashed and twisted.

If she was standing when the seizure came she usually fell but occasionally she did not totally lose control but went into a kind of trance. She almost walked in front of a bus on one occasion. The local greengrocer accused her of walking into his shop and stealing oranges. I thought this accusation to be pure spite but since I have read of epileptics behaving in this way.

Hers was a tragic life. The family believed kicking over her high chair as a baby and striking her head on a fender caused her illness. My fear was that it was a heredity ailment although no one suggested it.

I don't think public attitudes have changed much over the years. In my late teens I met a lad who was sacked from his clerical job for the same affliction. Some twenty years ago I saw antagonism towards a child in school for the same reason.

On one or two occasions Alice threatened suicide by hanging out of the top bedroom window. Momma would cling to her wrists and send the grandchildren to fetch the men to help haul her back.

I think these episodes were ended when Dad was the only man available and he stood below and shouted, "Right you boggar jump."

She didn't jump but clung on with a superhuman strength. I think Momma and a neighbour managed to get her back in but someone called the police and she was taken to Mapperly Mental Hospital.

When Momma and my uncle visited Alice she begged to be taken home and promised to be good. There was a family conference, my heart pounded and I felt sick with fear as they discussed whether she should be fetched home. The decision was that she should stay in hospital. That night I ran a fever and had a bad attack of nettle rash.

When Momma and Uncle John visited her a second time she was in such a distressed state they brought her home but she was not allowed out of the house alone after that.

Aunt Alice

I must have been a difficult child for I was regularly hit with the strap at school, usually for being late. We had a saying, 'Tread on a crack you'll get a whack.' All the way to school I tried to avoid cracks in the pavement but never managed to miss them all or the punishment.

At a very young age I made myself a promise, "When I'm grow'd up, I'll bash the teachers and burn the school down." But I never did, honest. Although I can't deny a sneaking sympathy for those who do.

I can still recall my first day at school. Some children were dragged in screaming, terrified of what was to come. Mam said I wouldn't get hit if I behaved myself. That was easier said than done.

The classroom had high windows, and exciting toys fastened to the ceiling. In the winter it had an open fire surrounded by a nursery fireguard. During the day, I think it was after dinner; we had to fold our arms on the desk and put our heads down to rest. I couldn't resist peaking, that earned a rap from the ruler from the beady-eyed teacher.

We were turned out in the yard at break, unless it was wet when Miss 'G' took her milk in the classroom. It must have been boiled for as she sipped flecks of skin lingered on her lips. I watched fascinated as her tongue flicked out from her snake like mouth to remove it.

"You," the ruler pointed my way. "What are you staring at?" "Those", I glibly lied, pointing to the swing and rocking horse fastened out of reach. "Can we have a go now?"

"No you cannot."

"Why?"

The question was not answered unless "Hold out your hand" can be considered an answer. I never saw those toys brought down, they were just a few of the interesting objects one came across in childhood that mustn't be touched.

"You've had the strap!" Mam said when she saw my reddened palm. "What've you been up to?"

"Don't know."

"Ya must know. What did your teacher say?"

"Solence!"

"Then you shouldn't chatter."

"I weren't."

Harry came to the rescue. "I think she means cheek. They always say that if you ask anything."

"Well I can believe that."

Later I heard her tell Dad, "They'll not get the better of her. She's as hard as nails."

She told my dad I was "a devil up the back". It was years before I knew what she meant but eventually I saw the similarity with 'a pain in the arse.'

I was five or six when I learnt that nudity was dirty. It was strange really for while we lived in the terrace we stripped off in the yard to share a tin bath with our young cousins. I think the bath, a small oval one, belonged to Uncle Frank who was a miner and had to have a bath every day. In any event I was fully cognizant with the male anatomy before I began school.

I sat next to a little boy who offered to show me his 'willie' if I would show him mine. This had no attraction since he had nothing I hadn't seen. He then tried to bribe me with spearmint balls that I took but didn't fulfil my part of the bargain.

One summer's day I had been playing doctors with another little girl, she was bit older than me. The lavatory at the bottom of the yard was 'the doctors' and I was the patient. My Mam discovered us. I was naked, she flew into a rage and I was forbidden to play with that dirty little so and so ever again.

It was about this time that I was forbidden to share my brother's bed. We were both walloped if we were caught in bed together which was hard on him for I had recurring nightmares and would beg him to let me share his bed. I often wonder if the newspapers created this attitude. I know a local little girl was murdered about this time. The crime was attributed to a sex fiend who eventually proved to be her uncle. I suppose there would be much talk of

incest and the need to warn children.

My brother and I were never nursed or petted but until I was five we were expected to give our parents a goodnight kiss. I noticed that my brother had stopped doing this and so demanded I be let off too. None of the adults kissed apart from Granddad's French visitors who kissed him on the cheek. The only other kissing was at parties when kissing under the mistletoe was compulsory.

Until the Second World War, the family all gathered at Momma's on Christmas Eve when she would cook black puddings for supper. I loved Christmas Eve. I remember flames red and blue crackling in the black leaded grate, the gleaming brass fender in the living room and the spicy smell of the pot-au-feu still lingering there. Aunts, uncles and cousins filled that tiny room to bursting point. Momma spoke very little English and the rest very little French so the air rang with sentences begun in one language and ending in another. When I heard of the Tower of Babel, I thought it must have been very like Momma's kitchen on Christmas Eve.

Bentwood chairs lined the walls from door to door each one occupied by an aunt, uncle, mum or dad. Granddad sat in a big chair with wooden arms and Aunt Alice sat in a rocking chair in the corner. The room never seemed overheated perhaps due to the number of doors; one to the stairs, one to the parlour and one to the scullery. Momma spent the whole evening in the scullery frying up the black puddings she had made earlier in the day. They were a rich chocolate brown and were served in great crusty sandwiches to the grown ups, while we 'petit chou chou,' had chips. Pale soft white chips cooked as only Momma could cook them.

In the middle of the room stood the big wooden table covered with an orange and white oilcloth. The huge pot jug had pride of place next to Grandad's cap. The uncles threw tanners (old sixpenny pieces) in the cap and the Aunts took it in turn to take the jug to the beer-off to be filled with foaming brown liquid.

After supper, every one had to do a turn. They all had their special songs. Dad used to sing, 'Silver Hair and Heart of Gold,' to Momma. I have never been able sing but I loved to recite and someone would lift me onto the table to do my piece. I remember saying a poem that began, 'I know a little cupboard with a teeny tiny key.'

The song we kids liked best was a rude one that Uncle Tom sang. It was about a crow and the chorus began 'Sing brethren sing.' Then followed, 'And said "you old bugger you can't catch me"' and no one was walloped for singing it.

Before the party broke up, Momma would make coffee. She ground the beans in a cast iron grinder and they drank it black. Momma's party began the round. Then each of the Aunts took turns, year by year, to have parties on Boxing Day and New Year's Eve. They weren't as much fun as on Christmas Eve although we played lots of games like, Postman's Knock and Hunt the Thimble. We also played a game of forfeits where a long piece of string was threaded through a wedding ring and fastened into a circle. We sat round a table holding on to the string underneath. When the piano began playing we had to pass the ring along the string, when it stopped we all brought our clenched hands onto the table. The uncle playing the piano had to guess who was holding the ring and if he guessed right you paid a forfeit (usually kissing somebody or doing something silly like standing on one leg).

The grown ups played too and one of the uncles, my father's younger brother, used to kiss me on the mouth. I hated it because he smoked a pipe and his breath was foul.

When it was our turn to have a party all the cousins stayed the night so that the grown ups didn't have to leave early. We slept six or eight to a bed. The grown ups went home and an Aunt, having had too much to drink, was pushed home in a wheelbarrow.

I don't remember having many presents but I did have a teddy bear although I don't remember it being given to me. I think it was probably my brother's and I inherited it. Once I was given a celluloid doll, I didn't have it long though for that Christmas a child was burnt to death and a celluloid doll had caused the blaze. Dad came home from work took the doll from me and threw it on the fire. It blazed instantly and I was distraught. I screamed until I was slapped.

I only ever had one other doll. One with a pot face but I never had any affection for it although in my early teens I enjoyed making clothes for it. During the war I gave it away to my boy friend's sister who had it about a fortnight before breaking it. I remember feeling very upset and wished I had kept it but we were all exhorted to part

with our toys because they were unobtainable.

I had given my Teddy to a neighbour's child early on in the war and although I was thirteen I cried when I saw it lying in the rain on the toilet roof.

We didn't get presents from mother's relations. This wasn't surprising since they were all struggling to feed and clothe their own broods but Grandma Allen (Dad's mother) gave us an extra thrupence and Aunt May one of Dad's sisters sent a parcel of books at Christmas. I have passed one of the Golden Wonder books to my daughter.

One birthday, I think Dad must have had a win on the horses; he bought my brother a red pedal car that I played with more than he did. I also recall him getting a fairy bike while I got a little metal toy pram. I threw myself into a tantrum and bashed it against the wall for I would have preferred the bike.

My parents were very afraid of fire and mother made my baby clothes and underwear of real flannel instead of the cheaper flannelette. One of her brothers had been burnt to death and the trauma remained with her all her life.

The child had been left for a few minutes while Momma went to fetch bread from the corner bakery for Grandpa had to have his bread fresh daily. In old age, Mother, suffering from dementia would cry out, 'Fire, fire,' and bang her stick on the floor.

It wasn't until I was married that I told her how, but for my brother, I might have suffered the same fate. Mam and Dad went to the pub across the road after we had gone to bed. Once they were safely out of the way we got up found our Christmas presents, and played with them in front of an electric fire. I had a new dress and put it on. The skirt flared out and caught fire. My brother pushed me down and rolled the hearthrug round me. My legs were burnt but we went to bed and I suffered all night before re-staging the whole thing in the morning.

The often-quoted warmth and trust amongst the working class forms no part of my experience. We were outsiders, as 'foreigners' always are. I deeply felt my Momma's isolation and the insults towards my Aunt. The front door was permanently locked and the

back door was locked when we went out and bolted when we went to bed.

Aunt Alice gave me a big block of Bournville chocolate on my fifth or sixth birthday. I'm not sure what size it was but I thought it was enormous. It had probably been given to her as a present for she had no money to spare. I took it round with me and left it on the doorstep while I returned to the house to have a pee. The back yard was reached via an entry with a high wall, it could have taken only a few minutes, but when I returned the chocolate had gone and I hadn't even had a bite!

At this time we didn't have baths but were washed down in the kitchen copper after the wash water and the copper bottom had cooled down. The copper was a brick construction in the corner of the scullery, a fire was lit under it to heat the water and the clothes went in after they had been ponched in soapy water. Then they were pulled out on a stick and rinsed. The whites had a final rinse in water that had a Recket's blue bag swished in it. Sheets, pillowcases and Dad's collars were starched. Starch was a powder that was mixed with cold water before boiling water was added when it changed from white to clear. Finally they were all put through the mangle in the yard.

Washday was always a bad day when Mam was at the end of her tether and we kept out of the way as much as possible. It was worse if it was wet for then the house smelt of damp clothes and windows and walls cried with steam. We didn't have a proper airer so the clothes were hung on the nursery fireguard round the fire.

The slightest misdemeanour would earn a slap. I think it was the same for most of my generation. Smacking was the normal way of disciplining a child and we were more fortunate than those whose mothers saved punishment for dads to carry out. Mam's hands may have been hard but I'm sure men's belts were harder.

Although we were still hard up, we were better off than many of our neighbours who were unemployed. Men stood on street corners, singly or in groups wearing baggy trousers with braces and collarless shirts open at the neck.

One of my own uncles was unemployed after being demobbed in 1918 until 1939. Two others, one in the lace trade and one in hosiery were on short time. Dad had managed to get a job with Trent Bus Company despite having a 'gammy' hand. His right hand had been trapped in a press at a factory. It left him with a claw with only the thumb mobile. As he had not actually lost a digit he received no compensation. The owner sent a letter of sympathy to his union and promised him a job for life. He said when he returned to work he was given employment sweeping the factory floor at 10/- a week less than he had been earning.

He managed to disguise his disability by wearing mitts and drove the buses until he took early retirement following a heart attack.

Mam had been trained in tailoring before she was married and took in sewing. We still didn't live in luxury though. Dad mended our shoes and put blakeys (segs) in the heels.

A big treat was when one of Dad's friends went poaching rabbits. He would throw the rabbit over the wall into the yard and come round later for the money. We had a nail inside the back door on which to hang rabbits by their hind legs. The skin was peeled off the hind legs first and finally easing it over the head. The rabbit was browned with onions and stewed with prunes. My brother and I shared the backbone and the head and we squabbled over the brains.

Another delicacy at this time was tripe, which Mam cooked with onions in water, adding flour and milk to thicken it. This was the way dad liked it. I hated it, preferring it cooked as a brown stew the way Momma did it. I didn't like milk at all and we had many a battle to get me to eat milk puddings. When Mam's back was turned Harry would swop dishes with me after he had eaten most of his.

We had a small bottle of milk at school and I would do anything to get rid of it. Later I spent my milk money at the local sweet shop. We didn't have meat very often and chicken was a luxury that we had at Christmas.

My family were very honest. Dad had no time for those who stole from work although he emphasised the penalty of getting the sack and losing your good name more than righteousness but like

most people he considered game to be God given and every man's right.

He was also very anti buying things that had 'fallen off the back of a lorry,' it was years before I understood the phrase referred to stolen goods.

Most of my clothes were made by Mam to be serviceable, skirts out of old trouser legs, and dresses out of odd bits. I did have one dress for the Sunday school anniversary that I thought was marvellous. Aunt Alice made it from a bag of net bits from the factory it was made in layers of frills and I wanted to wear it forever.

My brother and I were sent to Sunday school morning and afternoon although Mam and Dad never went to church except for weddings and funerals. I enjoyed going and I especially liked the decorated texts we were given to take home. I learned them by heart and was often chosen to read them aloud.

Sunday school outings were the highlight of the summer. We played tug o' war and ran races. I liked the sack race and the egg and spoon but I never did well in the three legged because I went too fast and pulled my partner over.

Cakes were a rare treat and the Sunday school tea served iced buns but you had to eat the bread first. We all watched for the signal and made a grab for the buns.

People often bemoan the demise of the Sunday school influence but I regret to say that although they instilled a belief in God in me they did not have any influence on my childhood behaviour. Of course I learnt the Ten Commandments and that God would punish your sins but like many children of today, I was amoral.

Once I ran to Momma with a bleeding knee, sobbing I said, "that God has tripped me up." I don't recall what crime I thought I was being punished for although I suspect it was lying for I was a pathological liar.

The story of Adam and Eve gave me a fear of death but I comforted myself with the thought that the world might come to an end before I died and then I would be spared from dying.

I went to the Salvation Army's Saturday afternoon Magic Lantern shows until they stopped giving free oranges. The shows were uninspiring and only worth enduring for the orange for we had oranges only on Pancake Day and in our stocking at Christmas.

Later, after our second move, I had a lovely Sunday school teacher. Her name was Joyce and she almost inspired me to follow in her footsteps until, after we had rehearsed a religious play, the parson refused to let us perform it because it was sinful to dress in male garments. We would have had a towel on our head and a sheet wrapped around us.

I never went after that but it was some time before I told my Mam. When she found out I was given work to do at home since one wasn't supposed to play out on a Sunday.