

CHAPTER I.

Industrial disputes – Annual wage rises - Cost of living index – London Weighting - Harold Wilson – Public unrest – Activists – Life at home – Growing family – Making Room - Secondary Schools – Comprehensives - Mother in Law – Mother's death.

Although Harold Wilson was a skilful leader of the Labour Party, he was weak at tackling the Trade Unions. Unemployment was rising and that was certainly visible in the printing industry. The government was unable to prevent the unions from demanding wage increases. The sterling crisis eventually caused the pound to fall in value.

The blossoming youth culture at the country's helm gave an indication where the country was heading... as the Beatles dominated the sound waves. Within four years, the voting age dropped to eighteen. A survey by the lobby group Child Poverty Action Group showed that large families continued to be the major cause of poverty. An increase in child allowance had no effect on my income; any increase I received was immediately removed by income tax.

My working life remained greatly affected, as everyone else's, by the antics of the militant trade unionists. The threat of 'walkouts' – instigated almost without warning, became almost a weekly event... from miners to dockers, car and dockyards workers. It was depressing. A special police group formed to deal with public unrest – usually outside factory gates. It almost became a comedy – jokes were made on the radio – Peter Sellers acting as the Trade Union official in 'I'm alright Jack' with Ian Carmichael as the new employee and commentators taking off Red Robbo, the union activist at British Leyland. Away from the influence - viewed from afar, it might well have been a good Whitehall farce..., but, if involved, it was uncomfortable, worrying and lamentable.

Although the working environment in many firms, particularly the larger, strained - by poor industrial arrangements, this did not extend to all. Even within those firms who distanced themselves from the unions, there were always a few militant members who tried to stir up unrest... Those firm - that had a strong management - who laid down strict guidelines that they stuck to, refused to take on known troublemakers... told the union Head Office, 'they would not take on any more labour if forced to employ such people'. In these instances, and I worked at a number, they were not forced to, the unions not wanting a fight. It was known that if firms had on their books union officials – on National or Executive Councils, the union Head Office, not wanting to make their representatives positions difficult, backed off!

This strong management ethos would not work so well in Nationalised Industries; workers would call out allied trades and firms supplying parts or materials. Some of these activists were local part-time union officials who sat on committees... were well known at union headquarters. Being told that if they wanted employment they would have to curb their union activities never went down well! In those instances, firms shut down their UK factories - and went abroad.

Life at home, compensated for the stresses of work - was fulfilling. The children well used to the routine of school, kindergarten, library and family outings. Sally... gave birth to Ruth, on 2 September – our second girl. This was another landmark for our family - were mostly graced by boys! Simon prepared to start at Longfield Primary School... at the same time as Janice – the next-door neighbour's daughter. I remembered my first days at Longfield – it did not seem so long ago, remaining unchanged over the years...

Excited by the thought, Simon, even though giving up his friends at the kindergarten, took to school easily. David was about to begin at the play school, taking Simon's place, keen to get cracking – doing all the things Simon had been talking about.

When David was born in 1961, only five percent of eighteen-year-olds entered university. We had the goal, to prepare all our children to go onto higher education. Rachel was two - sleeping in her cot in the small front bedroom. It was a lovely period, the family all doing so well... happily, having many outside influences and all taking part in the various outings and holidays. Rita, Sally's mother, was a frequent visitor being picked up from her home by car to be taken back home in the evening. She played an enormous part in raising the children always taking an interest, reading stories, babysitting, creating a link with the past. She was very much involved in all that the family was doing or planning to do... not in some interfering way but listening to everybody, making sensible comments thereby being a stabilizing element, totally accepted. It was, exactly what I wanted to happen. It was sad my parents were not so interested... I do not remember one visit made as a planned or off the cuff visit and cannot offer any reason why they were so disinterested.

There had to be some adjustment to the sleeping arrangements so we had plans drawn up to develop the loft and have an attic bedroom. These passed by the local planning control without any restrictions. The dormer windows, one for the false landing and the other for the bedroom - looked out upon the rear garden - faced east. The sides were tile hung. The new room measured six feet, where the stairs came up from the bedroom below, by sixteen... widening to eight foot, for the rear half. A large fitted wardrobe completed the structure. This proved to be a boon and provided a bedroom for Simon and David - later Benjamin.

We enlarged the kitchen taking the sidewall out another four feet, totally revamping the interior - having the hot water system updated too. We felt we were making a fine start to creating a good home for an expanding family in a pleasant suburban town close to all schools.

In 1965, there were still grammar schools in the Borough - skimming off the top stream of junior school achievers. As each school only admitted about thirty new students per year this restricted the social mobility of the vast majority... even though children could sit for entrance the second year - finely sieve those in secondary schools. Secondary Modern Schools lacked the dedication of the top two streams whose work ethic helped maintain a higher discipline. Parents of high achievers keep an eye on what is going on - how their children affected by less disciplined bottom streams.

Over eighty percent of the working population was a trade union member. This ensured, that there should be, a great bond between the Labour party and the trade union movement. Social inclusion was part of their manifesto and the betterment of workers lives included education for their children - free, and a higher standard - achieved within a comprehensive system. That was the idea of Shirley Williams, Secretary of Education. Through weakness - not insisting on all children attending a comprehensive school including those who were fee paying - privately educated. Not pumping in sufficient funds to insure the scheme 'took off...', the scheme faltered, never to achieve its planner's goals.

Sally and I were not fully alive to the changes experienced by our children in a 'comprehensive' education system... we were no different from many other parents. Who could have predicted the almost immediate lowering of standards and lack of discipline? It is obvious that if there are no enforced standards, and you cannot remove troublemakers and the lazy, standards will drop! The freedom allowed to children, more women working, and the abounding youth culture... changed society forever. Coupled with, a sexual behavioural thing gleaned from the media writing about the new cultural elite and women's new place in society.

We had busy lives to lead and formal education was just about to start for our eldest. We thought that society, and the educational system within it, would be the same as the one we had grown up with... so we planned ahead basing everything on our past experiences. It is not that we took our eye off the ball - allowing the government and local education authorities to ride roughshod, we were in uncharted territory.

If we could rely upon our children receiving a good formal education we should concentrate on providing a happy learning environment at home... backed up by visiting galleries and museums incorporating music and drama lessons... all, as a total learning experience...

Mainly with the children's learning in mind, and to make them socially integrated - able to deal with their peers, we sought the help of a pre-school in Pinner. Eventually all our children attended this school either adding drama or dancing to their normal studies. I had also set my mind on all the children learning to play the piano, as a matter of course, when they reached seven.

Sally and I had expectations... that children should be well mannered, speak correctly, and be obedient - my own upbringing defined this as a prerequisite. I could see by observation that Sally's home life had been built upon similar standards. I could never understand why other parents allowed their children to wander around whilst eating and drinking or to roam whilst the adults finished their meal. Similarly, not sitting still at the table or banging their cutlery, shouting, screaming or generally playing about. Bad behaviour is not just of the present age... there has always been a belief by some parents that, 'we must not stifle children's behaviour, self expression or creativity' for fear of restraining natural growth. I believe it is better to lead by example, giving explanation - why, doing what you want, when you want it, leads to disruption - false expectations and hopes.

Allowing children to dictate how those around them have to change their behaviour to accommodate theirs is antisocial. Children taught that there is a time and place for everything - curb their natural desires for immediate action.

The family's first few holidays, after my father-in-law's death, were with Rita. After a couple of years, she elected to stay behind especially as the family grew! Thereafter we always had our holidays one week at a time - at half term and perhaps an extra week in the summer. One of these, usually the spring half term, would be always to Eastbourne, at the YMCA, where we spent many happy years exploring the local countryside and beaches. These three one-week holidays did increase as the unions negotiated extra holiday weeks... always spent away from home - to create a break from the routine, socialise the children and give Sally a break!

The car was packed to the gunwales with children and clothes, buckets and spades, boots and pushchair ready to disgorge at the sea front opposite the hotel. There we would over the years meet the same staff, who made us welcomed, giving us a special tea especially just for the children. Evening entertainments were formed around organised games like beetle drives, pin ball and table tennis.

Our trips into the country - plotted on an ordnance survey map - taking a circular route that included as many interesting, historical sites as possible. It was difficult each year to do a route, not experienced before.

Although the ordnance survey map describes accurately what is within a given area it does not say how the route changes according to season, weather conditions or to alteration since the map surveyed. It leaves out that there is a bull, the stile is missing the path overgrown... or that the farmer has ploughed right up to the field's boundary, over the path! Many are the times, we have found ourselves in a difficult position faced with viscous barbed wire, giant stinging nettles, lethal brambles, and storm filled ditches and streams, menacing cattle, private roads and overgrown tracks.

These more negative features, to an otherwise jolly occasion, needed a high degree of positive thinking on my part. I had to impart sufficient *joie de vivre* to fortify, not just the bedraggled, wet, tired, hungry masses, but Sally, who was still in the rear echelons, about to retire from the struggle. I am pleased to report that there were neither mutinies nor mass pickets the following morning. We all set off in high expectation after an injection of exciting tales of daring-do in the tribal lands. It was probably the thought of cheese rolls made in the back of the car, which gave them, hope and succour - to be reached at an appropriate stage in the walk.

These difficult times, experienced by all on walking holidays in Britain, have to be 'got over'. I did it by entertaining - keeping the children busy during the day - a task needing considerable effort. As soon as negativity and 'giving up' - not wanting to walk or not joining in, happened, that tolled the bell of passing day. I could not continue against dismal moods. It became too much effort to overcome their lack of 'spirit'. Fortunately, this did not happen until they were much older...

It was not just those times at Eastbourne which had the comfort of warm hotel at the end of the afternoon but happened too when we went to Ludlow or to some distant ram-shackled farmhouse selected from the farm holiday handbook borrowed from the library. It was always taking potluck that sometimes leads to some remarkable places to stay...

By this time, my brother Stan had three children, Michael being born the same year as Ruth. That same year Jean became pregnant again, which brought about a yearning in Sally to have another baby. However much I described the effects this addition might have to the family exchequer Sally was adamant that that is what she wanted - that another baby would not cost any more because we already had all the clothes and furniture.

David, who had a most easy going nature, never gave us cause to have any fear that new experiences would upset him - went to school in September, attending the same school as Simon. His work progressed very much on the same lines as Simon. The difference being the Simon's class had a preponderance of girls whereas David's a more even spread. As all parents, we became used to the school routine - requirements for homework, the school uniform and the times for starting and finishing. Rachel, who was three, now helped looked after Ruth, walking to the shops and library, and over the hill, to grandmas.

At that stage in 1966, I was becoming aware that no matter how much I worked - to cushion unplanned expenditure, I would never be able to put money aside. I explained to Sally that I was concerned that we would never be able to afford all the extra curricular activities, and certainly not private junior education. Sally said that we seemed to be able to cope... could not see how our situation easily changed - by unforeseen circumstances... because we had all the things necessities for family life, announcing joyously, 'I'm pregnant again...'

Sally paid the bills, usually through the bank, at the same time as the shopping... budgeting for the following week. I do not ever remember money put aside for emergencies let alone holidays. What money came in went out. I had just enough to pay my fare or petrol to work and about fifteen pounds a week for food, tobacco and a daily paper... the routine, started when first married... and continued whilst working in industry. Having a child at two year intervals soaked up the increase in salary, not giving a chance to put some by. The perpetual overtime cushioned any unplanned for event sufficient to allow maintaining the house and car and keeping up the kindergarten and music lessons.

Saving is a habit... a good habit perfected when young. When, explained, 'you cannot have something when you want it' and, 'putting something aside for a rainy day', are two well known sayings... things cannot be planned perfectly - even the far seeing... it gives comfort and security to have 'a float'... Unfortunately our float was more overtime working.

This was the year the Wilson Government setup Britain's first Race Relations Act - whose powers aimed to reconcile cases of discrimination based on grounds of colour or race. This extended, a couple of years later, to include employment and housing. It was this action by the government, which prompted right wing groups to band together to form the National Front. Two years later Enoch Powell gave a speech, which included the River Tiber remark... ultimately to lead to his dismissal.

Still the unions pushed for higher wages and shorter hours. The wage freeze, which was initially voluntary, proved ineffective. Even though the policy given backing, the Labour government

did not consider what was to happen after the year was up? Britain stepped back further from its onetime Imperial role in Africa.

It was difficult for me to keep pace financially with the number of outgoings even though I was still doing the same amount of overtime. I was never ill nor had an accident. Being employed in a high earning occupation as well as being able most weeks to do overtime - to pay for extras, we could maintain this standard of living. Industrial strikes, changes in work pattern, redundancy and firm's closing avoided if possible and I was always scanning the job vacancy lists or thinking of new ways to secure a steady income. It was all quite stressful having to do things, which I did not really want to do. Taking on a new technology was not something I really wanted to do. Scanners and electronics - in any form, I had a natural antipathy. I was steeped... in the past - being used to craft methods of reproduction... My training locked me into a time warp of hand skills gained over a long period.

So my life... bringing up a family - providing for them, continued. I was most disturbed that I could not make Sally see that there was more to life than just having more children - providing those that we did have, with a better start... giving them time, showing greater interest... all would benefit.

Benjamin was born July 16, three days before my birthday, in 1967. Simon started cub scouting and piano lessons about the same time. My preconceived ideas about making sure my children were able to swim continued... they all started at the age of four... Every Saturday morning, we would go to the Northolt swimming baths and watch them go through their lessons. Having piano tuition now began and we were very lucky finding a young woman who was about to start teaching the piano. Miss Day was perfect for the job - within walking distance of home and with a natural affinity to young children. I explained that I wanted all the children to have lessons when the time came and she agreed that seven was the right age to start leaving out the theory until later in the process. The tuition books bought in Harrow at the music shop in accordance with her wishes and Sally's mother provided a music case. Rita was in total agreement with what we were proposing and told us of a piano which was up for sale. We bought this, had it re-felted, re-tuned and polished. It was not brought up to total pitch - thought the newly refurbished action would not take full tightening of the strings... we continued until its next re-tune. I was very pleased that all my previous thoughts about the positive nature of music lessons were paying off. Each child, when introduced to lessons, took them uncomplainingly - as a matter of course - exactly as I thought they would! To further help their understanding I thought about getting the children to hear music performed professionally.

At work, our monthly union meetings had changed from Doughty Street to Red Lion Square in Holborn. At the Conway Hall recitals given every Sunday at a very low cost - being subsidised adult education. Most of the recitals were string quartets and as a family, we occupied the gallery. Rita gave us a further venue to try - at the Chiswick Music Society. This we fitted in with those at Red Lion Square. Those at Chiswick were for accompanied solo artists, singers and music lectures. By this time, Simon began recorder lessons at school and often accompanied his grandmother at the piano and recorder.

Sally's mother took on another part-time job - playing piano, at a local school for dance. This she combined, with her permanent position at Sudbury Junior School - teaching piano and recorder - taking the children through their exams, playing at choir practice and morning assembly... These teaching posts filled by taking a bus to Sudbury - from the bottom of her road.

The Operatic Society of Greenford used Rita to accompany them, playing Gilbert and Sullivan operas. On other evenings, she played recorder with a group, which gave occasional concerts and playing cello, with the Wembley Orchestra.

Simon was afforded more attention and detailed scrutiny, than any of the other subsequent children. This was not intentional but a matter of course. Every parent lavishes special care on the first born because they are new parents... it is only natural. This does have rather negative aspects especially with the second child who has to take second fiddle.

We questioned every sound, movement and mannerism, seeking answers to," is this behaviour normal, do they always breathe like that, shouldn't we do something about it?" Through this concern and attention they can develop faster, walk and talk sooner, become potty trained at an earlier stage than later arrivals. This evens out and does not become a lifetime advance over their siblings even though relatives, friends and health workers clutch at these forms of behaviour as a means of comparison. However, it can cause resentment if not reasoned as being accepted as normal. I have written previously about the feelings I held towards my elder brother, feelings that I had not only as a child but as a teenager too. I was aware that he appeared brighter more alert, cleverer and more successful. These deficiencies within me, that I so keenly felt, were not things which I compared to others failings but feelings I held within myself. I knew Stan to be more disciplined towards study and more serious minded towards his training. His natural in-born skills and attributes compensated, to some extent, by my more artistic feelings.

My younger brother Derek got married that year to Carole Howard at the same Methodist Church that Stan had. Shortly after - that same year, Roger, Sally's brother, and Thelma - living at Buckhurst Hill, had their first son Crispin.

Sally and I visited in turn both my brothers in their new homes, Stan in Chesham and Derek in Abingdon as well as Roger and Thelma in Buckhurst Hill. These visits reciprocated throughout every year keeping us all up-to-date what each of us was doing. Sally's mother who was very kind to afford us the time and consideration baby-sat for us.

Sally and I bought our first washing machine in 1960. It was a twin tub and had to be pumped out into the sink after every wash. It was invaluable especially for us having a family. There was a certain amount of satisfaction having two washing lines filled with nappies and liners with all the other baby clothes and accessories. This was purchased about the same time as our first refrigerator - allowing us to join the other thirty percent of the population in owning one.

Ruth was slow at beginning to talk. This was not of great concern but something needed to be done to ensure that this state of affairs did not carry on. Every time I came home, when not doing overtime, I went up to her bedroom, where she had her high sided cot,- the small front box room, and began to do what was to become a continuing exercise of speech therapy using a balloon to articulate sounds by vibration, reciting common words and reading nursery rhymes. Within a relatively short period of time Ruth 'got it' .There was no looking back after first grasping the idea and reading became no problem. Sally told me that she was pregnant again just after her thirty-seventh birthday in 1969. This was not only a shock but also much unexpected and I must say I was very annoyed. I made up my mind that this could not happen again... I did something about it...!

Sally was not at all pleased but I explained that we could not afford any more children if we wanted to give every child a chance to have extra curricular tuition in whatever sphere that they showed an interest in. I was now thirty-four with six children trying to keep many plates spinning! As for full-time private education, that was already not a possibility for any of them. We were already paying each one to have piano and swimming lessons as well as drama for Simon and David, dancing for Rachel and later pony riding for Ruth. Sally said that if she could not have any more children I would regret it...!

I could see that trying to explain my feelings to Sally - that having more children was going to reduce the amount we could do for those we already had, was impossible... that what was possible when they were young was not the same for what could be done when they were older... that it was not fair that one could have a better start than another. I was getting older and I could visualize I

would not be able to give all the children the same attention – that our holidays would never be the same with the whole family participating.

Our family was enlarged to six that coming December by the birth of Rebecca, who was active, alert and ever questioning... all good signs for the future. As with all the other births, it was successful and accomplished. Sally delighted in having another child which she breast fed for as long as possible gaining much from the experience; with all of the children this went on for over a year and I am sure the children benefited. The old pushchair would have to do even more noble service and so too all the other pieces of equipment. What a massive release and relief it was to know that there would not be any more children. The house was beginning to burst at the seams and there were not any more spaces to take up. Quite what was going to happen when Rebecca finally had to move out of our room I could not imagine - there would have to be three girls in one room, not a sensible or happy turn of events.

The pattern for the family continued. Nothing was changed. We still went to the library on a Saturday where all the children had their own books. We still had a bag of sweets to help us on the way home. The concerts, trips to museums, galleries and Commonwealth Institute continued. Blackberries picked during the end of the summers, walks arranged along the canal and holidays still prompted a farm holiday book out of the library. Scouts, cubs, brownies: choir practice for Simon and David and all the other routines continued unabated. We were complemented wherever we went on the good behaviour of the children. As a family we all did the same thing together - there was never any friction nor decent. We still did not have a television to watch, card games played quite a lot, monopoly, chess, draughts and leggo took up any spare time. Once started, piano lessons were accompanied by the annual exam. All the children took and passed each exam as it came along and getting them to do their practice was, by now, such a normal everyday occurrence that they did it without question. This is what I thought would happen all those years ago when I first thought of my children having lessons. This acceptance of what was normal practice applied to all the other activities taken up and if other challenges presented themselves, they took up a place alongside the others as a matter of course.

My mother had been a diabetic for about ten years and treated herself with injections prescribed by her doctor. Now that my parents were living at Pinner Green, [Derek having moved out when he married Carole in 1967], with Nan, who had by this time retired, occupying Derek's room. Dad was eighty, still active and quite capable of walking to North Harrow to visit us. He never understood when my mother was due for an injection, nor did he keep a check on what she was doing. I was called by Nan in an emergency and asked to "come round" for mum was ill - suspected that it had to do with her diabetic condition. When I arrived, Dad and Nan were pacing round not knowing what to do and mum was by this time in a delirious state. The doctor had been called, arriving shortly after me. He asked a number of questions about what had gone on and what medication administered. No one knew. This lack of knowledge totally threw the doctor who then dithered saying that perhaps it would be better to get mum to hospital as she had by this time passed into a coma. With that, I returned home to await news, which was not long coming. My mother was declared dead within a few hours never regaining consciousness. She was sixty-one.

What a terrible waste for I discovered later her death was totally unnecessary. Had the doctor given her a large dose of insulin she would not have gone into a coma. Even if the cause had been by some other reason other than not having had her injection, a further dose would not have had a disastrously detrimental effect. My father was now at a loss. He did not want Nan to be in the flat although he probably realised that life would be difficult for him if she was not there. He appreciated that it would be impossible to live with either Stan's family or mine - there was no room.

There was obviously a problem... my father could not come to terms with. It was patently clear that he would be far better off staying where he was - sharing the flat with Nan, but he could

not feel happy, for whatever reason, her being so close. They had known each other for my father's married life. He never spoke of it nor did she they both went their own way... In the end, they both split up having to go into separate council homes... neither home awful but they did not provide privacy, which they both wanted. Gradually they deteriorated. Nan died within a year and Dad a year later.