

I was born in the Gorbals district of Glasgow in 1940, six months after the war started. I'm one of ten children, I've five brothers and four sisters. I'm the third eldest, having an older brother and older sister. My earliest recollections as a youngster was of during the war. Although everybody talked about "the war" you didn't know what they meant. There were plenty of men in uniform around. One of my pastimes as a youngster was to watch the trains going in and out of the Central Station, many of these being "troop trains", either taking servicemen away or bringing them back. My father was called-up shortly before I was born, he went into the infantry. First he was in the Black Watch then he was transferred to the Royal Scots. He never saw any foreign service, the furthest he was from Glasgow was when he was posted to the Orkney Islands. He used to say for his active service he fought in every pub in Britain. I can remember him coming home on leave in his uniform with all his kit including his rifle. At that time soldiers had carry their weapons with them at all times because of the threat of invasion. They had no ammunition, in the event of an invasion they were to report to the nearest army barracks or police station. I remember when his leave was finished, we would go to see him off at the station. What sticks in my mind is the image of the train being filled with men in uniform and the air filled with cigarette smoke. I started school a couple of months before the end of the war finished, it would be March 1945.

I can recall faintly the VE-Day celebrations, bonfires in the middle of the street and the street decorated with bunting. Over the next year or so, there would be more celebrations, as the prisoners-of-war started to return home, again us youngsters didn't know what this meant. I have faint memories of the German prisoners-of-war, seeing them in middle of Glasgow, moving around quite freely on account of the war being over.

Away back then TV was in its infancy, so children tended to create their own entertainment. This consisted of street games, listening to the wireless, reading books, going to the cinema and joining one of the youth organisations such as the Boys Brigade, Boy Scouts etc. Everybody seemed to go the Sunday School, also for the under 12's a favourite haunt was the Band of Hope which in our case was in the local church hall. I found out years later that the Band of Hope was an organisation set up to warn the masses about the evil of partaking strong drink. In the Sunday School calendar there were two main events, the Christmas Party and the Sunday School Trip. My earliest memories of a typical trip was horse drawn lorries lined up outside the Sunday School, the horses decked out in ribbons. Everybody piled on board and were conveyed to one of Glasgow's public parks, although the trip usually took around half or three-quarters of an hour, it seem like a hundred mile trip. All the children would have their "tinny" (tin cup) and packed lunch in a paper bag, which consisted of a meat pie (cold), sandwiches and a goodie such as a cake. The day always ended with the races and all the youngsters would do their best to win a prize.

Every Saturday we would go to one of the many cinemas which were within walking distance of where we stayed, to see the latest American movie, it being the Saturday matinee, the hall was wall -to -wall children. Usually there was a serial in the programme, this was known in the childhood vernacular of the day as "the chapter". By the antics of the children as they left the picture hall you could easily tell what type of picture had been screened.

I learned to read fairly quickly, I thought reading was magic, I read avidly, anything that had words I read, our local library was about a mile away from our house and although children were only allowed to take out one book at a time, that didn't deter me in the least. School reading books I'd devour as quickly as I could and be looking for a new one.

In Glasgow when I was young the main form of transport was the tramcar or as the natives called them - "caurs". Although there were buses on the road, they were not as numerous as the trams. When I was a teenager, trolley-buses made an appearance for a short period of time, but the "caurs" ruled supreme and were part of the Glasgow folklore. Trains were also in abundance, being hauled by steam-driven locomotives, the building of which was one of the major industries in Glasgow back then, along with the shipyards, the heavy engineering works and steelworks.

The house I was born in was known in the local patois as a "single-en" i.e. a one room flat which was multi-functional in that it served as kitchen, living room, dining room and bedroom. There was no inside toilet or bathroom. The toilet was located out in the back close, and there was no light when the toilet had to be used at night. It was a terrifying place for a youngster to go in the dark, but that was the way it was. Our house was on the ground floor of the tenement building, there being two houses at that level, with three flats on each of the other landings.

Across the street was the primary school me and my older brother and sister attended. In those days the closes and streets were lit by means of coal-gas lights. Most of the houses at that time had minimal electricity facilities, which usually consisted of a light and one power point in each room, this being installed just before the war. We stayed in that house until July 1949, when I was nine, and we had a few more additions to the family. We moved to a new house in one of the new corporation housing schemes on the outskirts of the city.

My granny on my father's side, whose house was about a mile away from ours, had no electricity whatsoever. Illumination was by means of a gas mantle and her wireless was powered by "accumulators" i.e. primitive re-chargable batteries. My other granny she was lucky to have an inside toilet with a light, her house had electricity.

At that time book-making was illegal, but nevertheless the local bookie used to stand at the corner of our street. There would be lookouts posted to watch out for the police, a cat-and-mouse game was played between the two. On the other side of our close there was a small general store, the owner of which was the only person in the street to have a car. Deliveries to the shop was done horse-drawn vehicles, also coal was delivered to the houses on horse and cart. In the summer a pony and trap would come and for an old penny you got a ride in it up and down the street. Childhood games seemed to have had their seasons, street games were very popular, such as "beds", "kick-the-can", "leave-oh" and "jauries" to name a few, "ropes" and "ba'" were favourites with the girls.

Back in those days when people didn't have much money one of the most common ways of getting some cash to tide you over was to make use of the services of the local pawnbroker. It was a common sight on a Friday night to see the queue at the pawn redeeming the man of the house's suit for the weekend and come Monday morning it was returned to the same place.

The "society man" was a well-known visitor at the home of most Glasgow working class families, he was the local agent for one of the assurance societies, from whom most people had bought some life insurance. Another regular visitor was the "cheque" man, he being the local agent for one of the finance companies who gave credit to the people in the form of a cheque was used to buy clothing and other household goods at large warehouses in the middle of the town.