My North Tyneside

My North Tyneside is a collection of experiences and memories from the people of North Tyneside. The pieces reflect our culture, community, and change over time. Voices range from children to people in their nineties and the memories documented are our history.

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Contents

Happy Days

Although as a baby, I was taken home to a flat in North Tyneside, having been born in North Shields. Most of my life has been spent in Northumberland. I have, however, many memories of North Tyneside.

I remember the waves of the Leisure Pool crashing after the warning siren blared. The excitement of swimming with the waves. Jumping over them as they approached us. Watching each other & waving at the window of the diving pool & scrambling on the balls of multicolour. Dad always let us go to the vending machine afterwards & I would always choose salt & vinegar twist crisps.

We were allowed to go to the amusements in the holidays. We would have a tub of two pence coins and we'd spend an age on the platform machines. Clearly remembering the noise, the lights & the anticipation of winning our fortunes. The waltzers, the dodgems, the bumpy slide, the sideshows, Gypsy Rose Lee or her granny or whomever she may be! Picking winkles from their shell with a pin. I remember us taking our French student to The Spanish City. My dad leaving the waltzer green.

Our favourite trips were to the glorious beaches of our area. Dad would pile 'the whole street' in his estate car after Mum had made sandwiches for everybody. Dad even went back for more of our friends sometimes. As we piled out of the car, it looked like there was another load of kids joining from the other side. There were so many of us. We would play French boules sometimes in the soft sand. Dad was very competitive! They had so many children with them one time, a family with a barbecue thought we were from a children's home and fed us all. Happy days.

Jo Crawford

Memories

Some of my memories of the area include being bathed in a metal tub in front of the coal fire and having to share the outside loo with other families! We moved to Holy Cross into the prefab houses built just after the War. This was before brick houses were built and I remember digging around the trenches in the surrounding fields to make dens. We would adventure through the farmer's fields, later known as Battle Hill and going to the Swallow for frogspawn and frogs, now known as the Rising Sun Country Park. I also remember getting the ferry to Jarrow, as there was no pedestrian tunnel or Tyne Tunnel, or green bus to Wallsend or North Shields.

In my teenage years, I would go to the local youth clubs and hops (dances). We would go to the pictures at Queens or Tyne if we didn't have much money. Otherwise, The Ritz. My first job was at George Angus on the Coast Road. I simply went into their reception and asked if they had any vacancies. There was one for a junior in postal and filing. After that, I moved onto a job at Thermal Syndicate, working in the accounts department. I loved this role as maths was my favourite subject.

When I got married, I lived in a flat above the shops opposite The Forum in Wallsend. I watched from my bedroom window as all of the buildings were demolished; Tyne Picture House, Penny Wet Pub, both knocked down as The Forum built. When I was ready to go back to work, I got a job in the newly built Co-op, across the road from my flat. I worked in the check office on the machines, feeding in customer Co-op numbers to their dividend entitlement. I also worked on small savings and banking. I think probably around 80% of Wallsend people were Co-op members, so I knew a lot of people! My final working days were with North Tyneside Council in their accounts section. Here, I was employed as chief cashier and helped implement the dreaded poll tax.

On leaving work, I joined Wallsend Park's Ladies Bowling Team, which had forty members. Unfortunately, over the years, the numbers reduced and we now only have two ladies that bowl; myself and Dot. We actually joined the men's club and play bowls with them. Although the sport is on the decline in this area, the fact that men and women play together shows that things have moved forward as even ten years ago, this would not have been considered.

Mavis Robertson

North Tyneside Days

We climbed trees and swung across streams,

Indiana-Jones-esque, in Geordie fashion.

Days that went on forever and we never felt the cold.

Grazed knees and dirty cheeks, filthy fingernails, and grass stains.

The colours of our youth.

Friends to be found on every street.

New friends made without judgement.

'Boys are better than girls', but all good jest, and always a shared bag of sweets.

Summer days that were endless, energy soaring.

Daisy chains and dandelions, nettle stings and splinters.

Tougher than we thought, or maybe just stubborn.

Falling out, but always making up.

Dens and wooden swings bringing us back together.

An adventure every day that still feels like yesterday.

David S

Banana Slide Days

The banana slide that felt like a drop from a cliff.
Excited screams filling the air, as I skidded down in muddy trainers.
Squealing happiness piercing nearby eardrums,
laughter from my sister, cousin, friends.
'I'm next,' gentle pushes and shoves,
like today was the last chance ever to skim down that banana slide,
wedged into the hill as if it grew there itself.
The last day arrived; the slide removed before we were ready,
to grow out of playing in parks and grabbing our youth.
Holding it tight in our mucky, clenched fists,
as we pretended to be braver than what we really were.
Something we carry into adulthood, perhaps.
And still, when I pass a slide in a park decades later.
Still, I want to climb the stairs and squeeze my backside into the shiny metal,
hoping I would glide like the seven-year-old I was,
on the banana slide at Wallsend Park.

Helen

Our North Tyneside

by the Battle Hill Writing Group members

I was born in 1954, locally, and went to grammar school. In 1970, aged sixteen, I immersed myself in the nightlife of the North East. This was during the time I left school and joined the civil service. I got a job working at the Ministry, in Longbenton, where I stayed for forty-five years. My first role was office work, and I progressed through the ranks. When someone left, we would always have an 'extended lunch' on a Friday at Longbenton Social Club, where we would have food and drinks.

Pub Culture.

My first alcoholic drink was cider and green ginger. Lager and blackcurrant was a popular drink.

The Geordie Pride, a pub in Newcastle. We would go straight from work, have some food, then a drink. The folk clubs opened in Wallsend. Other drinking haunts were Scamps, Tuxedo Junction, The Mayfair, Federation Breweries, The Cooperage, The Burgundy Cobbler, Sands Club, and the Penny Wet—which used to be thriving with the ship workers.

At the social clubs on a weekend, we would have to do the '50/50' where we had to do ballroom dancing before hitting the disco. Dancing was a big part of our lives; go-go dancing, disco dancing, ballroom dancing, country dancing, Motown dancing. It kept us entertained and fit!

I was in the forces and we drank a lot. We would always have to sober up for coming back on board after shore-leave.

We would go out early and run to the bus station for the last bus. It was always an event in itself, with people laughing, singing, and sharing chips.

Fashion

I would wear Ben Sherman shirts, Wrangler and Levi jeans.

We would go out wearing mini-skirts. Dad used to say, 'Don't go upstairs on the bus wearing that!' before I went out.

Hot pants and ra-ra skirts were popular, tank tops, duffle coats, and flares.

I would wear pastel shirts, Chinese slippers to dance in — ideal for the moonwalk and lambada!

Music

My brother was six years older than me and was a 'Mod', so influenced my musical taste.

Folk music arrived in the late 1970s and early 1970s, with Donovan.

In the 1960s and 1970s, we listened to music from Cliff Richards and The Rolling Stones, Simon and Garfunkel, Bob Dylan, The Animals, David Bowie, The Osmonds, The Beatles, and Cat Stevens. Then in the 1980s, it was music such as Adam Ant's, and new romantic music from Spandau Ballet and Duran Duran, with the fashion of white trousers and dickie-bow tie, waistcoat and jacket. I loved David Bowie and the Eurythmics. I would get Disco 45, a magazine about music, and go to Woolworths to buy the records that were in the charts.

We would play a game at school called ‘Penny Throw’. Pennies would be thrown against the wall and whoever got closest got the money. I used that money to purchase my first ever record; Billy Ocean’s, Red Light Spells Danger.
Since then, Northern Soul and Motown have been my favourite. We would go dancing and to Motown events, and I still do.

Bill, Andy, Patricia, and Carol

I Don’t Know If I am Coming or Going

A Sudden Arrival Then

‘Go get Auntie Sandra and quick!’ my mum cried out, gripping the upstairs banister.

I stood in winceyette, purple striped pyjamas and sensed I had to go. In Cullercoats, I knocked next door and waited in the still darkness. The hall light came on above the porch fanlight and my favourite teenaged babysitter answered the prearranged call.

‘My, my. Couldn't your mam wait until the morning?’

‘No,’ I answered with puckered little lips, and I wondered what Auntie Sandra meant.

‘You two are a team, no doubt. Go back and tell your mam it is okay, and I will come round in a minute.’

I plodded back next door in my slippers and my mam, who was crying out, hugged me close. Minutes later, Auntie Sandra let herself in and stroked my bewildered blonde fringe.

‘Your mam is going to get in an ambulance to Preston Hospital. Your auntie Ellen and Uncle Jim are coming for you in their car.’

‘A car ride? Lush. Can I go in the front?’ I asked as my mam moaned.

‘I am sure you can. You will have to ask your auntie Ellen. She is your real auntie,’ Auntie Sandra said, but I could not understand.

Auntie Ellen came in and Uncle Jim sat outside in his orange Datsun estate. He stayed behind the wheel as I climbed in the back. The ambulance man helped my fat mother into the ambulance. The blue lights were still spinning and lighting up the dark street.

‘Bye, Mam.’ I waved through the back window, and we pulled away. I started to miss my mam, and Auntie Ellen looked over her shoulder and said,

‘Nothing to worry about. Time flies.’

Auntie Ellen and Uncle Jim took me to my grandma’s. For three days I ate Weetabix with hot milk sitting by the coal fire. They told me Preston Hospital used to be the workhouse and I nodded. My dad was sailing home, Auntie Ellen said when she came to pick me up, saying he went to sea to get out of The Ridges. Back home, my mam was beaming as she showed off my new little sister. She was a nice addition, my mam said, but it did not last long.

Now A Slow Departure

Auntie Ellen is waiting for me at the window in her finest royal blue coat. She lives near where the Plaza stood proudly and matched everyone’s parents on the dance floor. She is stooped, not bowed. She waves and I let myself in with my key. I am sitting in the living room I have known for five decades. Once a forum for family gatherings, she now lives alone and feels alone. The orange Datsun passed long before Uncle Jim and we are all grown up.

She tells me she feels safe and squeezes my hand. She thinks I have been away for a while. She remembers not why or where, but fretted all night about the important appointment.

‘We are going to the memory clinic, Auntie Ellen, at Rake Lane Hospital.’

‘Oh, I see. Oh yes. Nothing to worry about.’ She smiles at me and repeats my given mantra.

I so wish for her to feel, ‘Nothing to worry about.’

At the hospital, the magic carpet is an electric buggy ride through an impossible maze. Wonderland nurses from our health service embrace her and take her further into the unknown. We sit in an empty waiting room coloured in bright greens and blues.

She smiles and says, ‘Nothing to worry about.’

As always, I meet her smile with mine.

A nurse calls her, and I answer, advising my aunt’s right ear is the one that works. Auntie Ellen squeezes my hand and shuffles away for tests.

The shocked nurse from Neverland returns to the waiting room.

‘Are you aware your aunt has no clothes on under her coat?’

I sigh and say, ‘No. I am sure the diagnosis will be easy. I’m sure we won’t shame her. She is one of ours, and one of mine.’

Auntie Ellen has nothing to worry about.

Auntie Ellen and me

Ian McSally, 2024

Memories of Childhood

Happy days are here again.

‘Mum, we’ve been sent home from school,

the outside toilets are frozen solid.’

‘Mum, where is my woggle?

I’m out with Jonathan today,

it’s Bob a Job week.’

Going into strangers' houses to do awful jobs for a shilling and maybe a small tip.

What on earth were they thinking?

Even now it makes me shiver.

Exploited young boys,

feeding the coffers for Baden Powell’s child army.

Knock down ginger.

Ring the bell, run, hide.

Watch them open the door to nobody.

Laugh and find a victim with a longer front path!

The extent of our anti-social behaviour.

‘I’m home, Mum.’

‘Son, the school’s been round.

The football’s off, the pitches are frozen.’

Life is over.

Adrian Lee

North Tyneside

Bedford Street, treeless.

A jungle made of concrete.

But springs on its way.

The herring gull thieves.

Stealing sausage rolls from Greggs.

It beats wet raw fish.

A murder of crows,

that is the collective term.

One more dead brown mouse

Adrian Lee

Cakes are Made to be Eaten

I was in my early twenties when my grandfather passed away. He was in his mid-80s and had been without his beloved, my grandmother, for over fifteen years. I don't have many regrets in life, but I regret not spending more time with my grandad after I moved out of my family home, aged eighteen and became absorbed in university, relationships, and socialising.

I do, however, have some fond memories of my grandad. He was a big man with a big heart, from Wallsend. A proud, quiet, calm man and so funny. My own dad gets more like my grandad as the years pass. Grandad used to come to my family home each Sunday and Wednesday for dinner. He would bring treats and I remember watching him unpack luxurious yoghurts and fragipans that I would be desperate to tuck into.

Grandad would tell stories and had little mottos that still make me smile. His sayings were like amusing little poems and phrases that only made sense to us. A secret code. All birthday cards would be signed from 'Grandad and the A-Team', using our surname as a reference to the 1980s hit TV show. My older sister and I would stay at Grandad's flat in Hugh Street, Wallsend. Our treat would be eating creamy vanilla ice cream out of cups, with a crumbly, melt-in-your-mouth Cadbury Flake, as Grandad recalled stories of his life. The ice cream always tasted better at Grandad's as we dipped our spoon in the cup and snuggled in on the sofa. Eyes wide, we would listen attentively to him, telling us of his adventures. He would talk of the oven he built during the Second World War, known as 'Geordie's oven' and he would tell of the friends he made in Tilburg, Netherlands, who he continued to visit into his retirement. Grandad was the biggest explorer and knew so much about the world and he was always so much more interesting to listen to than the teachers at school.

After the War, Grandad was a baker working for Greggs. He travelled the world with my grandma; visiting Russia, America, and Europe, always taking a Greggs bag to proudly display in the holiday snaps. He would bake and decorate delicious cakes, and each Christmas, I remember being in awe of the fruit-filled delights. Covered in marzipan, icing, and intricate detail, they would lie like delicious ornaments on the sideboard in the lounge, opposite a painting of Mona Lisa that he always said was the original that I still believed in a tiny way, even after seeing her in the Louvre.

My sister, Grandad, and me

Precious memories don't just live in a special place in our minds, they live in our hearts. Grandad was a legend and I cherish my memories of him. Perhaps part of him lives on in me, in my fondness of all things sweet. Although I'm definitely more of an eater than a baker!

Helen Aitchison

Cullercoats Beach

Getting an ice cream on Cullercoats beach,

was me and brother, to buy one each.

He went ahead and I lost my way.

My mother retrieved me and saved the day!

Maureen Waters

Cut Knees and Cup Drinks

My childhood was a catalogue of cut knees, bruised arms, and nosebleeds. Caused from adventures outside, climbing trees, jumping across streams, and from a few fights with my younger brother.

It was 10p mix-ups from the newsagents that increased to 20p as I got older — but the number of sweets remained the same. Childhood was frozen cup drinks that you sucked on until the cola brown-colour dissolved, leaving an iceberg of frosted, tasteless ice, and a red-raw mouth.

Playing out on endless days; cartwheels, chase, and getting into trouble that was more harmless fun with infectious laughter.

I look back, grateful, but wondering, where did time go?

Lisa

Fish (and Chips) Quay

I remember Granda taking us for fish and chips at the Fish Quay. We would walk down Lower Bedford Street, down the bank, to the sight of the sea. Sometimes, we would see a ferry coming in and me and my brother, wor kid, Alan, would put an arm in the air and pull our clenched fists down as if to blow the horn of the ship. Granda would then do it and we would all laugh as we bounced down the path, stomachs rumbling in anticipation of our meal.

The nearer we got to the Fish Quay, we could smell the fish. It stunk, but it represented one of the age-old industries of our local town. Granda wasn't a fisherman. He was a welder, but he knew fisherman and would often wave and chat with some while Alan and me peered in at their catch and made urgh noises. The fishermen were always happy to see him and us. A smile on their faces despite the gruelling and very smelly work.

Me and wor kid would mess about, jumping over cracks in the pavement and chasing the seagulls who waited, beady-eyed, ready to swoop in and snatch a fishy scrap. The queue for the chip shop would be out the door at times. People didn't have much money, but fish and chips were always a generous portion down the Fish Quay. The scent of vinegar and batter escaped the door — a much more welcome stench than raw fish.

'Can we share a sarsaparilla, Granda? Pleeeease?' I would ask in desperation, pulling at Granda's arm.

'Aye, son, yer can,' he would reply, winking and ruffling my mop of ginger hair.

'Yesss!' My world was a happy place.

Those fish and chips, on the bench, looking out to the sea, with wor kid and Granda, were the best food in the world. When life was simple, kind, and easy. When Granda was here. Innocence, friendship, love.

Something that I'll never forget, no matter how many years pass.

Robert

Ghost Town

I drove through town today.
Bustling bodies,
and tentative traffic.
The same old.
Yet different enough,
to feel like another life.
A world where familiarity was you,
at the bus stop,
on a Monday afternoon.
Taking me into shops,
that sold anything, everything,
you could want and don't need.
Long gone.
Demolished.
Repurposed.
Invisible at the bus stop.
Only there in my mind,
smiling with your bingo win.
Yet still I slow down.
Searching for you,
amongst a queue of strangers.
In my town,
my own ghost town.

Helen

Grandma and Grandad

When we were little, we would go to my grandparents for tea. It was the late 1970s and there wasn't the traffic on the roads like there is today. Because of this, we would cycle the two miles from our home to our grandparents' in Howdon. My older brother, Jimmy, and me, would get on our Raleigh Chopper bikes and bomb off. Any excuse to get on our prized possession bike and travel, would be eagerly embraced. My bike was yellow and Jimmy's red. We would cycle, far too quickly, and with no helmet, already-grazed knees on display and our Aertex t-shirt or sometimes tank top. Getting to our grandparents in record time, we would be greeted with a glass of milk or juice and a big hug from Grandma — the type of hug only a grandmother can give and one you are never too old receive.

She would let us bake with her, usually rock buns and we would dip our fingers in the mixture when she wasn't looking. Then we would go in the garden with Grandad, picking veg or we would listen to the sport with him. He always looked at Grandma with such love that made me know people don't fall out of love as they become old.

After Grandad died, we would still visit Grandma, knowing somewhere in our child brains, that she needed us more than ever. And in a way, we needed her more than ever, as she was the only grandparent we had. She lived until I was 28, and Jimmy was 30. We were lucky. I remember clearing her house in Howdon and feeling the sense of loss I hadn't before. It was different with Grandad. We loved him, but our love was deeper with Grandma, because she was there longer, and well, she was just Grandma.

I still drive past her house and sometimes choke up, all these years later. It's changed, the front, windows, doors, garden. But I'm grateful it is still there and so is Jimmy. Our memories still in the earth, the foundations of that house. And I always smile, grateful I had grandparents, especially Grandma.

Tommy P

Jam Sandwiches

We played outside all day, no screens to keep us in.
Strong limbs, smiley faces, a healthy glow lived on our skin.
Lemonade, bread and jam, devoured, quick as a flash.
Then back outside to the game, we'd skip, hop and dash.
Bewitched and Beverley Hillbillies, on black and white tv,
'What no colour, such a shame!' But it was great to me.
Matinee on Saturday, oh glory, what a treat!
So excited to see the film, we were glued to our seat.
Eyes wide, we were mesmerised, sweets melting in our hand.
Watching cowboys and Indians holler, in some strange, far-off land.
Our mams made stews and broths, everything fresh, for tea.
There were no chicken nuggets, never heard of Macky D!
At school we had PE and cookery, and learned to write a letter.
Now kids rely on fast food, spell check, I wonder which way is better?
We didn't have much money, content with what we had.
We were rich with happiness, hardly ever sad.
I know the world keeps turning and progress has been made.
But I wonder which is best,
life today, or jam sandwiches and lemonade?

Elaine Gardner

Laurel and Hardy Come to North Shields

Lovers of the cinema heard rumours of an impending visit to Tyneside, which would bring some joy and laughter to the dark days of the depression, a period of national economic downturn. The North East had been greatly affected due to staple industries of coal, iron and steel, and shipbuilding taking the worst of the hit.

When Laurel and Hardy visited Tynemouth in 1932, they drew thousands of people from 'far and near' who were eager to pay tribute to the iconic comedy kings. Young and old alike gathered around the Grand Hotel steps and leaned from the balconies of the Plaza to glimpse the slapstick duo fooling around. They presented gifts to orphans and signed hundreds of autographs for their excited fans. The Mayor and Mayoress of Tynemouth escorted them to a civic reception at North Shields Town Hall. Stan Laurel told the gathered crowd, "I was not born in North Shields, but I just feel like I just belong here. I am proud to be amongst you all". Stan considered himself an honorary Geordie, having lived at number 8 Dockwray Square for four years during his youth. The long, steep flight of stairs that led down from Dockwray Square to the quay are thought to have been the inspiration for a famous piano moving sequence in their film, The Music Box.

He attended The King's School, Tynemouth, where he met and became friends with Roland Park, who later went on to run a photography business in North Shields. The pair remained friends over the years, and Stan always visited Roland whenever he returned to the area. Stan's father owned the Borough Theatre, which he managed, along with a few others in Tyneside and Durham, and so began Stan's fascination with the entertainment world. His work took the family further afield to the Metropole Theatre in Glasgow, and at the age of fifteen, Stan moved there. He would soon take his first steps in show business. Although his career was to take him all over the world, he always remained closely connected with Tyneside through his correspondence with friends.

Saturday afternoons were the highlight of the week for the children of Shields who loved to go to the 'pictures'. For just a small town, North Shields was very well provided with more than half a dozen cinemas; The Comedy, The 'Boro' Theatre, The Gaiety, The Prince's Theatre (or Gaumont) and The Rex, to name just some. The young ones would stand in a long queue waiting for the 1.30 matinee to see films starring Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin and The Three Stooges. Flash Gordon and Buck Rodgers were popular comic strip characters who became animated through the medium of motion pictures. With hardly an accompanying adult in sight, the uniformed staff kept the high-spirited line of children in order as they laughed and jostled in the queue. Some had scraped together the entrance fee from their parents, or collected the deposit from empty pop bottles. Sometimes you could gain admission if you simply brought along a jam jar! If you were really lucky, you would have enough money left over to buy sweets at the foyer counter, such as black bullets or sherbet lemons that cut your tongue. It was even known that one child would pay to get in and would then open the exit door to allow his friends in for free when the usherette had her back turned. The usherettes' suits were maroon with gold braid trim around the collars and cuffs, and they wore highly polished black shoes. The ice cream boys wore white tunic tops trimmed in blue, white trousers and soda jerk hats. Some of the silent films had piano accompaniment to add atmosphere and reflect the mood of the story being played out. The music played louder and faster at the exciting parts. The boys would ride imaginary horses along with the

on-screen cowboys and were so immersed in the plot that they would shout out at the baddies.

Occasionally, the film reel would malfunction and if it broke down at a particular moment of suspense, the crowd would jeer and chant, ‘We want our money back,’ until free passes were issued that would allow their return.

Angela Craddock

Our Coast

Tynemouth, Whitley Bay,

the magnificent coastline.

Sunny days await.

Maureen Waters

My North Tyneside

I was born and raised overlooking the Tyne and 'The Yard' in 1936. At that time, things were terrible; poverty was rife. My family came from the furthest point south in the Country, a small place called St. Just in Penwith, near Lands' End, Cornwall. When I asked Mother how come she came from so far away, she said it was to look after other members of the family who had a contract pneumonia, and were convalescing in the miner's home at Gilsland.

I had three sisters: Bet, Stella, and Sylvia. Sadly, all are now deceased. Times were bad. I remember Stella telling me how they slept four in a bed! Can you imagine that happening today? Personally, I don't have many memories of this time. My furthest recall was Mother 'possing' clothes in the shared outside washhouse with an open fire heating water in a large pan. I remember this to this very day; it never leaves me — Mother grabbing me and getting my mouth washed out with carbolic soap, as something I had uttered must have been against Mother's upbringing. After that, I was a good boy! I attended Western School on West Street. During this time, I started my first job as a paperboy at Hamilton's Newspaper shop. Today, the building is a car park for Aldi's store.

After leaving school, I got a job as a roundsman — complete with leather shoulder cash bag and check book — for delivering washing in and around the Blyth area with Wallsend Co-operative Society Laundry on Equitable Street. There were two main working firms in the area at the time; Wallsend Rising Sun pit and Swan Hunters shipyard. Most of my friends choose one or the other to start their working life. I was different, I wanted to be a motor mechanic. I started my working career at Northern General Transports Depot on Neptune Road, behind the former Thermal Syndicate (now Heraeus).

I stayed there till 1954, then H.M. Government came a-calling on all young men aged eighteen for National Service. Weekly pay for National Service was thirty bob (£1.50) but if you signed on as a Regular with R.E.M.E. (Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers), you got twenty-nine shilling (£2.45). I did this and sent £2 home to Mother and lived on nine shillings a week.

Of course, things were a lot cheaper in those days and I had bed and board — all meals and visits to other countries paid for three years. I learnt a valuable lesson from those days: ALWAYS READ THE SMALL PRINT. The recruiting sergeant said just sign here for three years and your life will begin. What he failed to tell me was that I had signed on for twenty-two years with a three-year option. Which I took and left in 1957. I served most of my service in B.A.O.R. (British Army of the Rhine) and saw active service with the M.E.L.F. (Middle East Land Forces). M.E.L.F involved the first Suez Canal War with Colonel Nasser.

After demob, I started work as a driver/mechanic for the Wallsend Co-operative Industrial Society. The offices were on Carville Road, and consisted of five individually numbered shops. No.1 was the North Road branch. No.2 was Neptune Road branch, No.3 Coach Road, No.4 branch was on Coast Road (now a general store), and finally, The Pantry Shop, near The Rising Sun Hotel. The garage was based inside the dairy on West Street (now Hadrian Residential Home), which also housed the fleet of waggons for various departments on West Street. Each branch covered specific areas of Wallsend and Walker. Wallsend Industrial Co-op — it carried the 'Industrial' title because we had our own bakery just off North Road.

The flour was collected every Monday/Thursday from flour mills at Dunston in 140lb sacks, and that's heavy! Good job I was fit!

The fleet consisted of mobile electric butchers and electric milk floats, petrol fleet for groceries, collection/vehicles for butchery and all general department. They even had a Bedford Duple 40-foot bus converted to a travelling shop for the new area where the fourteen-storey flats were. It operated from No.3 Coach Road branch which was a bit of a tight squeeze. I remember some of the general items sold in the Co-op such as packs of margarine in red, gold, silver and sugar made up by hand and sold in individual blue bags. As well as Danish butter sold in slices from a wooden barrel.

In the course of time, the Co-op decided on a move to The Forum. After thirteen years' service for the Co-op, I had a change and started serving for the Queen again, only this time as a driver for M.P.B.W. (Ministry of Building and Works). Their depot was at The Green, which also housed a G.P.O. (General Post Office fleet), and G.C.S. (Government Car Service). The driving in this post consisted of collection stationery from Manchester and furniture from former air base R.A.F. Burntonwood, near Liverpool and servicing every government establishment, from West Hartlepool in the south, to Berwick on Tweed and the Borders in the north. This could be from paper clips to pension books which carried the red security label, security cabinets, and all office furniture. After we delivered all government forms for everything, we collected them back again as confidential waste and took it to a disposal site at Heywood, Manchester, where it was shredded and ended up as toilet rolls, I think. I won the driver of the year competition in the Team Valley and along with fellow drivers together, we won the team award, resulting in letters from the Minister at the time.

After three years, I moved to Cory Distribution Services, Gosforth — a brand-new factory with a new fleet of swap body motors. After the interview, I was flown south to head office at Reading with fellow workers, Harry from Bedlington, and Larry, from Killingworth. We were known as the 'Three Stooges' from forties film fame; Barry, Harry, and Larry.
I stayed in this role for seven years, before returning to my former role for three years before privatisation began, led by Sir Michael Heseltine.
I eventually ended my working career working as a care worker at various homes and work places with people with learning disabilities. After retiring, it was an honour to be asked back as a guest at their Christmas party. I was thrilled to say yes.

Time came for Swan Hunters to close. The last navy vessel built and launched by Swan Hunters Shipbuilders was *HMS Richmond*. The last vessel to leave the yard was a catamaran, *Sealane Constructor*, in 2013. I and fellow 'Swanssnapa' John K watched it being built by a small crew of craftsman and put into the water. Along with five others, we are known as

‘Swanssnappers’. I still keep active and I am now a ship spotter capturing all vessels coming in to and leaving the river.

Lane

Sometimes, when I was small and the night was drawing in like this, I would look at your house and think *I'll never reach it,* though it was as clear to me then as it is now. You live at the top end of this lane, not alone. There's a house to the left and another at this end of the lane where I'm standing. In between there's an expanse of grass and a high, wooden fence, like stakes, behind which runs the railway line.

Look! Billy Puffer steams past and we wave to the faceless passengers. You watch us, from your house in our lane, digging for buried treasure, roasting potatoes in bigger, better bonfires, leapfrogging, chasing and twirling, until we stumble — grazing pink rubber limbs on the damp, flattened earth. Buttercups, vines, and dandelions proliferate in our lane. Lilac flowers on tall woody stems stand sentry like. You watch from your vantage point in your house, in our lane, as a young policeman lifts the severed leg of a child from the railway line. Lilac flowers stand sentry like, broken dandelions weep milky tears and vines, with ghostly white flowers obscure the filth — the obscene teeming earth on the railway embankment.

A neighbour says my wavy hair is making him seasick and you laugh — a very desirable woman. The neighbour calls me over.

'Run to the shop, hinny. Ask for five Woodbines, an' keep a penny for yerself.'

The man in the shop weighs broken biscuits, slides them into white paper bags, asks if I've ever seen a ginger-haired tortoise with red spots. His knife-wielding assistant looks on, cutting sausage links with cold, mottled, pink fingers. The knife and her sausage fingers make me feel uneasy, but you laugh when I tell you about it, and send me off to play in our lane.

The Soldier and the Tinderbox live in your house. *The Dogs With Eyes like Saucers* live in your house.

The ground around your house is unrelenting with snow and clothes creak like boards on your washing lines. Your footsteps remain immortalized by the frozen outside drain you've just finished clearing. Billows of steaming bubbles breathe in and exhale beautifully against the diamond snow as your wash day continues. Your house screams with children. First tooth, first words, first steps. Bikes, dolls, skipping ropes — spill out of your doors — filling the day and the light and the life in our lane.

Dad dies and your house becomes a house of mourning. Your children don't recognize death, but they feel it. Your babies comfort, but your adolescents disappoint, distract, exasperate, and demean — do not understand you. You watch, from your house at the top of our lane, as we lengthen and love, and bring you lanky, long-haired boyfriends you don't approve. You refuse to speak. You wound and alienate us. Your grandchildren see you as you stand, open armed, at your house at the top of our lane. They fly and you catch them.

'Look!' Show them the passengers in the sleek, modern train.

Laughter and tears live in your house. Death, disappointment, and grinding self-sacrifice are gifts in your house.

The Quangle Wangle Quee lives in your house. *The Dong with the Luminous Nose* lives in your house.

Look! Strange children — they live in our house — play in our lane.

For my precious Mam, Gladys, with love, admiration, and respect.

A Curve and a Stone's Throw

Your husband's singing and the bathroom smells of aftershave. Steam drifts through to the bedroom, misting the window. Mam's house is only a curve and a stone's throw away. You remember her pacing, pushing the heavy chest of drawers against the door, curling on the bed, arm around you.

'Sleep. Sleep little thing. All's well.'

Your husband leaves the bathroom, and you scald him with words. He buttons them into his shirt, folds them into the knot of his tie. He shakes his head.

'A drink, that's all. I'm not your Dad.'

The kids run in, hug his legs.

'Wave to us when you go, Daddy,' they scream.

You watch them; dimpled knees kneading the armchair, fingers smearing the window, birdlike, frantic. See you and Mam breathing vapour, walking through stars, another adventure; sleeping on auntie's floor.

You bathe the kids and watch them crinkle. Make them rainbow hats and bubble moustaches, tuck them safe into *The Faraway Tree* again. Remember Dad sitting on your bed, telling your favourite story *Henny Penny,* singing his *Brown Ale* songs, Mam hovering. Change spilling out of Dad's jacket. Light dying as Mam coaxes him from the room. Mam coming back, counting the change, putting it in her pocket. Making a sail of the blanket, you shivering just before it lands.

The Biscuit King

He’s in our lane with his rifle again,
my brother Joe, the Biscuit King.
He won’t come home, have his tea,
he’s in our lane with his rifle.
There’re baddies to kill.

Billy Puffer an’ his passengers,
pressed their hands to their mouths.
As my brother, the Biscuit King, shot the baddies down.
Our lane was magic cos he was there,
my brother Joe, the Biscuit King.

I dream he still goes there,
rifle in hand.
Pockets full of crumbs an’ matchstick men.
Baggy shorts, a cowboy hat,
with a big wide brim, an’ a string attached.

Star.

A little star, pinned to his chest.
My brother Joe, the Biscuit King.

G.R.

My North Tyneside, by the children of the borough

What I love about where I live is that there is so much to do. There're loads of parks and places to go and play sports like football. We also have the beach, which is nice even in the cold, but I don't go in the sea in winter like my mam does! We have castles like Alnwick Castle where some of Harry Potter was filmed and we have a Roman fort in Segedunum. So really, North Tyneside is great and I have lots of friends here. **Dylan S.**

I like living in Wallsend because there are fields to play football and places to cycle. There's lots of shops and cafes. We have a cat cafe that I love to go to. We also have the Metro, which is a train and takes you right around the area and beyond into Newcastle, Gateshead, and Sunderland (although I don't want to go there). People are nice here and school is okay.
Matthew T.

I like living in North Tyneside because it is fun. I go to drama classes and gymnastics and the swimming pools are good. The libraries are also good and so is Segedunum. We went with school and that's why the town is called Wallsend, as it is where Hadrian's Wall ended. We also learnt about the industry like the shipbuilding and my great-grandad worked there.
Lily.

My favourite food is McDonald's, but that's for treats. Mam makes the best lasagna and I could eat plate after plate of this. I'm not sure what food is made in North Tyneside, except for stotties, that Dad sometimes has with sausages in. It's a bread bun but is nicer than a normal bread bun. **Eve T.**

I like living here but I don't like Sunderland Football Club. Newcastle United is the best. 'Toon, toon!
George.

My family has always lived in North Shields. My mam's grandad worked as a fisherman at the Fish Quay. I don't like fish, so I am glad I don't have to do that job. Nanna always says that places have changed so much from when she was a kid. I think I will end up saying that when I'm her age as well. We like to go to the sports centre, the trampoline park, and the cinema. We go cycling sometimes and I like the ferry from North Shields. I'm pleased I live here.
Lucas.

Sometimes Mam takes me and my little sister to Tynemouth Market on a weekend. It's actually a market at the Metro station. So, you can get straight off the metro and there are the stalls! They sell a bit of everything, really: toys, books, games, food, crafts. They have cake stalls and sweet stalls. Some of the ornaments and stuff isn't as good, but I love looking through the books and the jewellery. Sometimes they have people playing music and it's always busy. We usually get a cake or some sweets, that's my favourite part and the Oero brownies are my favourite. **Isabelle.**

I like learning about what our town used to be like and how children lived. Although, it sounds really hard and they had no TVs in the past, or computers. I'm not sure if they had make-up. I think they played out a lot and did a lot of sports and some children had full-time jobs when they should have been at school. I would like a job when I'm older. Maybe I will be a teacher. **Ava.**

One of my favourite things is going to the allotment with Grandad. He grows everything you could imagine and it tastes lovely, even with a bit of dirt on! His friend down at the allotment has chickens, so we even get eggs. I have my great grandma, but my great grandad died. Grandad and Grandma live in my street and my auntie lives near to us, as well and I play on the computer with my cousin, Zak.
Theo.

We don't play outside as much as my mam and dad did when they were young and they used to go to a youth club. I play football a lot and I go to drama, and I do go out sometimes around near home on my bike with my school friends. **Jack.**

I love it here because we have some good shops and I like going to the Spanish City for cake. Dad said it used to be like a fairground. Me and my sister like the pantomime at Whitley Bay Playhouse and the circus. There always seems to be things to do but it can be expensive, so we can't do everything!
Amelia.

The people in our area are really nice but it does rain too much. I still love my home, though as it's usually not raining when we are off school in the summer and we can go to the beach or Wallsend Park or Northumberland Park and I've also been to Saltwell Park, but that takes longer to get there.
Muhammad.

There are many old buildings in North Tyneside and some places have been knocked down and now have houses on. My mam used to go to Wallsend swimming baths, which isn't where it is now. The swimming baths is good, especially in Whitley Bay as they have waves

on in the pool. Mam used to go to those baths, too, but says they were really different. My grandma's house in Battle Hill also got knocked down. They were flats. But she is happy where she is now. **Lola.**

Beloved Boats

I am North Shields, born and bred, with grandparents on both sides, having worked on the Fish Quay. My great-grandfather was the captain of a Shields fishing trawler, and his grandson must have inherited his sea legs. My dad, Peter Irving, first fell in love with boat design after seeing the beautifully made vessels at Tynemouth Boating Lake on a trip there with his father. Aged 14, he started learning how to design and build his own boats in the back yard at home, including a canvas covered canoe and his own version of the Cadet, a hard-chine sailing dinghy designed by Jack Holt to teach young people between the ages of ten and sixteen how to sail.

Despite a mishap involving capsizing his canoe and having to be rescued by his dad who dove into the lake, he persevered with learning to sail and enjoyed many a day's outing all along the River Tyne, between Tynemouth Haven and Ryton Willows. In 1952, at the age of sixteen, Peter began an apprenticeship at Lambie's boat yard in Wallsend. On his first day, he was placed under the direct supervision of Geordie Booth, who turned out to be the very man who had made all the Tynemouth rowing boats that had first inspired him.

When described the boat he had started building at home, Geordie said,

'Well, you'll learn to build proper boats here, Pete!'

The young apprentice wore bib and brace overalls with a front pocket in which you kept your pencil and your blind man's rule (a three-foot folding ruler with imperial measurements). He describes walking in on his first day to a thick fog of blue smoke, with blazing braziers and the sound of hammering tools. His first job was to 'take the cans in', i.e. return the tin cans with tea leaves in the bottom to the lady in the attic stock room whose job it was to refill them with hot water.

Geordie had just started planking a new boat and my dad learned to 'hold on' with a hammer while another apprenticeship 'clinked' or 'clenched' the nails (a form of riveting). There was no place to eat your 'bait'. The men just sat on the staging planks on trestles in front of the braziers. There were several men from the same families working at the yard, including the Booths and the McConachies. The foreman was called Tommy Moody and my dad worked with many talented boat builders such as Geordie Booth, Walter Booth, Jimmy Morris, Jack Thompson, Bill Aitcheson, Bill McConachie, and Bob McConachie, the driller, who tended the fire for the steam box boiler, that went from one end of the yard to the other.

The boat painter was Neil McConachie and the engineer was John McConachie. Morison Lambie himself was an impressive looking chap with a little moustache who always wore a dark suit and a Homburg hat. Fellow apprentices included Danny Patterson, Matty Archer, the strong Eddie Brown who could carry a whole keel on his own, and John Kerr, who eventually set up his own boat yard in Wales. My dad also remembers the Scots who had different names for things such as 'sand stroke' instead of 'garboard strake' (the nearest plank to the keel). Peter and the men worked on a good variety of boats, including the 24-foot Trinity House made from larch with full planks, used for taking men and supplies to the life houses and to and from ships.

The men turned out these skilfully made wooden boats at a phenomenal rate, and became experienced at planking them up by eye rather than using moulds. All they had to go on at first was the LOA (length overall), the beam (widest point) and depth of the boat. The boat yard's main trade was life boats but they also made other types of vessel including naval whalers, work launches and the occasional pleasure launch with an in-board engine.

Peter completed his national service in the RAF for two years and returned to Lambie's to find that they had introduced fibreglass boat building. Dick Harty was a designer who had just joined and who had designed a new fibreglass eight-foot pleasure dinghy. He asked Peter to 'loft the lines', which means translating the information from plans into full-size templates. He was relied upon to 'fair off' (check and correct) the lines for many boats to come, including a new design of a 20-foot lifeboat. At the age of twenty-four, he was made chargehand of a 28-foot lifeboat, a big responsibility.

Having gained all of this experience, Peter set about building another boat at home, the GP14, also a Jack Holt design. My dad and his good friend, Robin Pattison, spent all of their spare time working in his parents' garage, and the boat was completed in around six weeks. The young men and their new boat, called *Karin,* ended up being published in the local newspaper, and Morison Lambie paid my dad a visit to compliment him on his achievement.

They towed the *Karin* to various locations up the coast as far Loch Awe, enjoying many happy sailing trips with their friends Norman and Gordon, who also worked at Lambie's. Peter finally left Lambie's, applying skills learned in the RAF to become an architectural model maker for Northumberland County Hall and eventually, Newcastle City Council. It was an exciting period of city planning at that time and he made the models for many important developments, including Cramlington New Town, Eldon Square, Newcastle Quayside, Byker Wall, St James' Park and the Tyne and Wear Metro line. The complete vast model of Newcastle City Centre that he worked on with his colleague, John (Jack) Laybourne, between 1963 and 2010, is still on display to this day with a plaque at the Civic Centre.

He met my mother, Veronica, at a planning department party. They married and moved into a Victorian house in North Shields. The attic was converted into a workshop so he and Jack could complete various private freelance modelling projects. As a child, I remember being fascinated by the large models of towns in our loft, complete with tiny people, cars, and trees.

Peter never lost his love of all things nautical. He owned and maintained several boats over the years, sailing for pleasure all around England and Scotland. Around 30 years ago he fulfilled his desire to come up with his own unique boat design and made a scale model from this. His ambition was to eventually build the wooden sailing dinghy full size, and he prepared by filling the house with the necessary materials, including huge planks of wood, much to my mother's bemusement. Sadly, my mum then became ill and this became the priority for the next few years.

After she passed away, the dream of the boat was resurrected. Now in his eighties, my dad cast his mind back to his time at Lambie's around sixty years ago. He literally used the loft to 'loft the lines', and bit by bit the 13-foot Northumbrian lugger began to take shape in his attic. Here he made a set of moulds and set them all up on the building board. This was to produce a full-sized half model to check if the lines were fair. He made the other half, resulting in a complete frame, with stem, keel and stern now constructed. The stem was laminated from ash strips and the keel was American white oak.

As much as possible, the correct sized scantlings (pieces of timber) were ordered from Percy A. Hudson timber merchant, North Shields. He then faired up (cut and planed) everything by hand. The stringers (the long strips that support the planking) were also hand-steamed into position. The planking followed with 9mm thick marine plywood to BS1088 specification and bronze fasteners. People were amazed and often asked how he proposed to get the boat down from the attic. He actually built it in kit form so that it could be taken apart and moved out in preparation for the next stage of building.

The Covid-19 pandemic spurred things on as my dad was categorised as vulnerable and unable to leave the house. A good friend and neighbour, John Hastie, set about building a custom-made boat shed in my dad's back yard and the project became well underway. Throughout lockdown, Peter recreated Lambie's in his own back yard, repeating the process he had already completed in the attic to assemble the boat permanently.

It was a momentous day when the boat was turned upright for the first time and we could really envisage the impressive vessel to come. It is now nearing completion and has come to life with its beautifully painted colours and oil-treated wood. All that is left to be done is for the bottom boards, seats, bronze fittings and accessories to be installed, ready for the launch.

The initial voyage will be to test stability and balance and to work out if any alterations are needed. In the future, a mast with a single balanced lug sail will hopefully be added. Peter has not yet worked out the location or exact logistics of the launch, but he hopes it will be some time this summer around his 89th birthday. The last thing to be added will be the name, *Veronica*, after my late mother, who enjoyed many years of sailing with my dad before developing a phobia of water in later life.

The long-awaited launch arrived on 23rd August. An active member of the North Shields community, Ernie Scott, introduced his cousin, Derek, former Commodore of Coquet Yacht Club, to Peter. Derek provided expertise and support, and the launch of *Veronica* could not have gone ahead without his help. After initial weather concerns, we departed from North Shields at around midday for our journey to Amble, where my dad has fond memories of sailing in the past.

Everyone gathered on the banks of the River Coquet, with beautiful views towards Warkworth and out to sea. We waited for the tide to come in. Suddenly *Veronica* was being pushed down the slipway and I was asked to jump in to balance the weight! Before being handed a life jacket and my dad began pouring a bottle over the bow, proclaiming,

'I name this ship *Veronica*! May God bless her and all who sail in her!'

He came aboard with me, Derek, and our friend, Regine. Off we went, rowing further up the river. We were soon zipping along with the wind in our faces, thanks to the last-minute addition of an outboard motor. Peter was at the bow with Derek steering from the stern, happily confirming that *Veronica*,

'Sits and responds beautifully in the water.'

As we sped at a rate of five knots towards Warkworth Castle, we admired the wildlife, including swans and oyster catchers. The fun did not stop upon our return to North Shields. Ernie had organised for two renowned concert pianists, Tyler Hay and Mark Viner, to hold a special recital to celebrate the launch of *Veronica*. As always, they put on a spectacular show, performing several piano four hands duets, with both of them playing the piano at the same time. They were delighted to accompany us all afterwards to continue the celebrations at the Seven Stars pub, where friends were waiting to congratulate Peter on his achievement. You would think that my father would now want a rest after all this as he approaches 90, but this is not the end of the story for Veronica. The next stage is to install a mast, sails and rigging. Who knows what adventures await.

Caroline Oswald

Feeling Free

As I sit and watch the rod,
bend and ebb with the tide.
A feeling of peace and calm,
washes my worries aside.

Gone, gone are my fears,
and so is my pain.
A feeling of freedom,
invades my mind again.

The lapping of the waves,
echoing in the night.
Help me relax,
and set my mind right.

I don't care about catching fish,
that's not the reason I'm here.
I'm resetting my sanity,
as I sit here alone on the pier.

Kenny Amis

Fishing

I remember fishing with my dad.

I remember the sandwiches, that we had.

I remember all the laughter the we shared.

I remember our jeans we all flared.

I remember losing my fair share of rigs.

I remember that fish; I bet it was big.

I remember the flask of instant tea.

I remember finding a quiet place to pee.

I remember catching naught but a cold.

I remember now and it makes me feel old.

Kenny Amis

The Rescuer

The ropes went taught.
The rain lashed at his face.
He tested his weight on the pulley,
and slid down at apace.

He reached the boat,
the winds made him sway.
But selflessly he continued,
and saved all souls that day.

Kenny Amis

Friendships: Built in North Tyneside

They told me that it's easier to be out than in with a new baby. So, in 2008, I found myself standing outside various baby groups in and around North Shields and Tynemouth, trying to pluck up the courage to go in. Leaving the pushchair outside, whatever the weather, for Bounce and Rhyme at Sir James Knott Nursery. I sang along while squished in among dozens of mums and babies, and the occasional dad.

There was a Breakfast Club at St Cuthbert's Church Hall where all the exhausted mums were given toast and a hot drink and told to sit and rest while our little ones lay next to each other, blinking at the sunshine coming through the clerestory.

I went to a breastfeeding group at the Methodist Church, where I felt like a fraud, as my baby would only take expressed milk. (But my goodness did I try until forced to accept that heartbreaking fact.)

As time went by and the babes got bigger, we mums started to return to work. I'd never spent much time in North Tyneside before having my first child. It was just the place I slept, a 'dormitory' I think statisticians call it, while I travelled further afield for work. But my new mum-friends were new family and North Shields became my new home that I'd lived in for eight years already.

I went back to work but changed my work pattern so I could spend more time with my little one. It meant we could carry on meeting my mum-friends and their now toddlers in new places. Blue Reef, Stephenson Railway Museum, Longsands beach, St Mary's Lighthouse, libraries, parks, cafes. Making more and more memories. Happy times, sad times. Supporting each other throughout.

Our children went to nursery school together, then primary school, then high school. Our weekly days out with the kids have long changed to annual meals out if we could find a babysitter.

They left high school this summer, now young men and women; the second generation of those friendships built in North Tyneside in 2008. And, in time, the cycle will begin again.

L.W.

My North Tyneside

I was born in 1931 in Potters Street, but we left there when I was one. In my family there were my father and mother, my elder brother, my two sisters, and me.

I remember watching the cows coming down Crow Bank. I was about 8 years old. I used to talk to the lad who looked after them when he was sitting on the grass. He stayed with the cows while they were grazing until it was time for their second milking when he took them back.

I got a job working with the milkman on Saturdays and school holidays. The milkman delivered to our house and was married to the farmer's daughter at the Village Green Farm. We delivered the milk on a horse and cart. The milkman stood with the churn in the street. I ran to the houses and collected empty jugs left outside. The milkman filled the jugs from a ladle which was called a dipper as it was dipped into the churn. I ran back to the houses with the jugs full of milk. I never, ever dropped a jug. The horse was called Bobby. I loved the work because I got a ride out on the cart, and we went right out to Point Pleasant. My mother wouldn't let me go out without my breakfast!

Bobby knew the way. I remember the farmer arguing with Bobby one frosty morning. Bobby was trying to eat the grass which was frozen, and the farmer told him off because it would make him ill. I didn't get paid but twice a year, the farmer would bring a chicken for my mother. She had to gut them. I got to play with the claw. I would play with the tendons, getting the claw to open and shut.

I remember my sister taking me up to the Ballast Hill at Willington Quay and Howdon. We watched the *Olympic* being towed up the Tyne to Jarrow to be 'stripped'. The *Olympic* was the sister ship of the *Titanic*. This was 'make work' that's not the official term, but it's what people called it when the government made up schemes to provide work for the unemployed. Stripping the *Olympic* was work given to Jarrow after the Jarrow Marches.

In the 1940s there was heavy snow — we couldn't get out of the front door. My uncle Jimmy was a skilled bricklayer, but during winter in bad weather, there was no work. To get dole you had to work. The men were given a shovel and shovelled up the snow on the High Street. It was put in trucks and taken to the Burn, where it was piled up. When the snow melted, it ran into the Burn. It ran off down a gentle slope. The snow was black with soot and it took a long time to melt — there were heaps of it.

Bill Burns

ENDLESS DAYS

Memories from my childhood - you ask me?
Skipping, two balls — sometimes even three.
An empty tobacco tin for the bays we made.
My head floods with all the games we played.
ENDLESS DAYS.

Always other children to have fun with outside.
If not, cowboys with my three brothers inside.
Turning the dining table upside down — a wagon,
to become, and I was the mother riding shotgun.
ENDLESS DAYS.

At the top of our street was the park.
Adventures there until it got dark.
Golf, tennis — a paddling pool too.
I adored the swings and to this day, still do.
ENDLESS DAYS.

The park seemed enormous and sometimes spooky.
Adventures included running away from the parkie.
When we had nicked some roses to make scented soap,
life was full of dreams and there was always hope.
ENDLESS DAYS.

The train to Cullercoats beach — winkles pinned out.
Egg and tomato sandwiches and ice cream cornet.
Plunging into the cold North Sea and splashing around.
Striped deckchairs when we eventually calmed down.
YES, ENDLESS DAYS.

Marie Rice

When I Was Young

When I was young in the 1960s, Monday was laundry day. The washing was hung out when the weather was fine on the washing line, suspended from posts or hooks, either side of the back lane. If the clothes had to be dried indoors (no spin dryers in those days), the windows would be steamed up with condensation — which was great for little fingers to make faces on the glass.

We used to play out till quite late on summer days. When we heard our mother shouting, 'Yooo hooo!' we knew it was time to go home for tea.

Our mother had quite a loud voice which could be heard a couple of streets away, so we knew not to stray too far from home. We had no central heating in those days. So, one room, the sitting room, was kept warm with a cold fire. The coal was delivered by horse and cart by the local coal man. The heavy coal sacks were emptied directly into the coal house via a hatch in the wall of the back lane.

Next door to the coal house was the outside toilet. There was no inside toilet, so winter or summer we had to go downstairs. We lived in an upstairs flat and had to remember to take a torch because there was no electric light in the toilet. We had no bathroom. There was a bath in the scullery which had a shelf that pulled down over the bath when it wasn't in use, making a worktop.

Alan Richardson

History of Wallsend Park Green Bowling Teams

The Wallsend Park Bowling teams. Was formed in the early 1900s. There were two teams at this time. The first was known as Wallsend Borough Bowls Team and the second was Wallsend Park Bowlers.

They joined together to form Wallsend Park Bowlers, as it is known today. At this time, there was only the gentlemen's league. In 1937, a ladies' league was formed, but both ladies and gentlemen were separate. The gentlemen's and ladies' league had a large number of members of all ages. Throughout the following years, both teams won a number of trophies. But nowadays the numbers on both teams have dwindled and now both leagues have amalgamated. There are now only nineteen male members and two ladies, and we try each season to recruit new members. We also have a social team consisting of the older members who used to be bowlers that meet every Wednesday at 12:00 pm to socialise and discuss any topics. This continues today.

History records, Wallsend Park Green Bowling Teams — Joan Williamson

My Memories

When walking to school, we often met our school friends on the way. We had lessons such as English, maths, cookery, biology, and religious education, with a variety of teachers. When we were badly behaved, we were sent to the headmistress's office to receive our punishment, such as the belt across your hand, and received a note to take home to let your parents know. Other times in class, you received a blackboard duster being thrown at you or a ruler over your knuckles.

We sat behind wooden desks with a lift-up lid to keep your books and belongings in. Our school day began at 9 am until 12 pm. Then 1 pm to 4 pm, with a break in the morning and afternoon of fifteen minutes.

After school, I went to my nana's as both Mam and Dad were at work. Our treat on arriving was bread and butter sprinkled with sugar unless there was rhubarb from the allotment, and then we had a cone of sugar with a stick of rhubarb. This, we ate sitting on the front step. Everyone in the street had their front doors open from morning till night. All the neighbours knew everyone in the street.

Our favourite time of year was when the ships from Swan Hunters were to be launched. We would watch this from over a brick wall at the bottom of Davis Street in Wallsend. What a sight we were, so full of excitement!

Our fun times were made up of playing games such as monti kittie, chasey, and Charlie Charlie, can't get over the water, and two balls. We also played knockie-door neighbour and then would run away! If one of us had a piece of rope, we would sling it over a lamppost and play turns each to swing from it.

Now all I have are memories, which I will always treasure.

Joan Williamson

Sunday

My cousin's drawn a picture of a cockerel an' it's great. The frill of its neck, the arch of its back, its scrawny gut-coloured legs. Me an' Jill sit on the step an' admire it, but he gives it to Sandra, the Kewpie Doll who lives in the flat upstairs. I follow Jill round the garden, shaking my jam jar of liquorice water. She heaves a Villa Lemonade bottle around, sloshes it back, forward, up an' down, sneers at my jar.

'Mine's ready. What's happened to yours? Here. Give it to me; you're doing it wrong.'

I swerve away, hold the jar to the light. 'No, it's fine, see.'

I show her my liquorice, all spindly an' curling over like a black treacle fence. We let the water rest, store it safe behind the front door, while we tramp the garden, fleecing the bushes, picking blackberries so Mam can make a pie. Spiders scuttle out of the berries, take giant steps with their thin, crafty legs. Jill's legs glisten below her Capri pants. Her mobile face shiny, bossy.

'Don't eat the berries, stupid. Insects. We have to wash them.'

'You're eating them,' I say, 'an' why do insects have to be clean?'

She cuts me a look, inspects a berry, stuffs it into her mouth. 'I'm older, an' I know which ones have the critters in.'

She wipes her fingers on her cardi, says we should put all the berries in her bowl.

'There's not much, see, an' Mam'll think there's more if we put them together.'

She smiles as my berries join hers, shows giant teeth, ridged in the middle. Juice smears the bowl, an' insects flounder in the jewel-coloured liquid. A train passes and Jill says people are waving. We wave back, though I can't see anyone on account of I won't wear my specs.

We sit cross-legged on the grass an' the soil smells like clover an' rainbows an' worm casts. When we stand, my skirt is all damp an' Jill's pants are muddy. She says there's thirty-nine berries, an' she'll eat one to make an even number.

Mam was the one who asked for the berries, but she looks like we're handing her a turd, or a big mangy dog.

'Out! Back outside, you'll be in soon enough.' She sighs at the washing, scowls at the berries we're still pushing at her. 'Over there, on the bench,' she snaps. She grabs the bowl, clonks it on the bench, clangs a white tin plate on top. 'Now out. Five minutes an' your dad'll be home.' She stares at the twin tub, the agitator, merciless, killing beautiful bubbles. 'Out, bliddy-well out. Now,' she says.

Dad's face lights our lane. He's singing "Nobody Wants You when You're Down and Out".

Me and Jill smile fit to bust. Beam cos our dad's so happy an' handsome. White shirt, blue tie, pinstripe suit, all lanky and languid spruced up smart for the beer.

Glynis Reed

Mam

I grew up in North Shields in the North East of England, on an estate known as “The Ridges.” The estate had a bad reputation, but I have memories of a close-knit community and of warm, and kindly neighbours.

Our house was a council flat consisting of three bedrooms, a kitchen, scullery, bathroom and toilet, and was always full. Not just because there were eight children in my family, but because my aunties, uncles, and their children congregated there. For most of the day, we children played in the street, or on a stretch of wasteland in our lane, only going indoors for meals or bedtime. At weekends, the house would be full of washing, with Mam fighting a constant battle to get the clothes dried and ironed.

Dad died of kidney disease when he was forty years old, leaving my mam to bring all eight kids up herself. And though she went out to work part-time, I cannot remember her buying a thing for herself — every penny was spent on us.

There were good times, sad times, and times I’d rather forget, but reading was a joy and a form of escape. Unfortunately, there weren’t a lot of books in our house, so from an early age, I devoured my school books.

The writer, Edward Lear enthralled me with his nonsense poems, and I’d go around reciting bits of them in my head: “The Dong with the Luminous Nose”, “The Jumblies”, “The Owl and the Pussy Cat”, “The Quangle Wangle’s Hat”. What riches a writer gives when they soothe and enchant a child with words they’ll never forget.

My world was small. I recall it through the prism of Mam, our house, and our lane.

Glynis Reed

DUTY

My story began on 5th February 1964 when I was born at Frater Maternity Home in North Shields, situated on the North East coast of England. North Shields is in the borough of North Tyneside, on the north side of the River Tyne, which separates the city of Newcastle and the borough of Gateshead. We are referred to as “Geordies” in this part of the world and are well known for our friendly personalities and great banter.

We’re celebrated for our stunning city, vast countryside, and award-winning coastline, as well as a few local consumables like Newcastle Brown Ale and pease pudding. And for me, the “Toon” as it’s affectionately known, is home. We lived in an area called the Meadow Well, or as we referred to it, “The Ridges.” It was a housing estate, heavily dominated by council housing, that became famous for all the wrong reasons in the 1990s. But when I was a kid, living there with my family, it was home and the area had a real sense of community that’s still carried in the air today, along with the cold North East breeze.

My mam, Harriet, met my dad, Norman, whilst they were working together in a local factory. Romance gave their shifts extra appeal, and they soon were engaged, then married, before they started our family. I'm one of four children and we grew up close as siblings. We had a good upbringing with Mam and Dad working hard to provide for us. There were always challenges in those days, same as we have today just in different ways, but my childhood was happy, full of adventure, and positive memories.

I don't have memories of my grandparents as both sets died when I was younger. However, I had many aunts and uncles, and plenty of cousins. Back then, families were big like in the 1970s TV show, *The Waltons*. Auntie Violet, Mam's sister, lived nearby and in my early years, we would play on the streets with our cousins, kicking a ball for hours on end until the sun went down. Mam was a traditional housewife, looking after us kids and keeping the home until we were older, whilst Dad worked as a fitter/turner in Hall Sections, a local factory. Growing up, Dad was made redundant from Hall Sections and began working at the docks.

The early 1960s were a time of growth and prosperity in our area. Recovery and development of industry after the end of the Second World War meant Swan Hunter, in Wallsend, and Smith's Dock, in North Shields, were producing and repairing ships. The Ministry was built and provided office jobs in the civil service for thousands of people from the area. However, things changed as the late 1960s approached, with coal mines closing in neighbouring villages across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, and Durham. Dad always worked hard, as most men did in those days — long hours and heavy work. He instilled a strong work ethic in all of us that I still carry today and have passed on to my own children. The life lessons informally taught that are shared between generations.

Home in the Meadow Well was crowded, with the six of us living in a three-bedroomed house. Luckily for Julie, this meant she had her own bedroom, whilst me and my two brothers were squashed into a room together. It was carnage and never quiet but there were more laughs than arguments. We were the best of friends (most of the time) in our younger days, then as we got a little older, personalities started to develop alongside new friendships with neighbourhood kids and friends from school. It was an open house around the estate, with

front doors never closed. Big families, crazy in a lot of ways, but the salt of the earth. Of course, there were some homes you would avoid, with varying degrees of characters.

Us kids would all pile into each other's homes, and there was always someone to play with. A close-knit community where my mates on the estate were looked after by my parents, just as I was by theirs. A community of carers. Everyone was welcome in each other's homes and if we needed anything, there was a never-ending stream of offers, kindness, and smiles — values that were always in fashion.

We grew up playing around the doors in the fresh air, running around until we were exhausted. Even in the cold North East of England, we didn't often feel the chill; we just wanted to be out with our mates.

Groups of us played around the estate, gathering to play street games like tin-o-block. This would involve an old tin and two gangs. It sounds like a simple game, and it was — something that cost nothing but brought hours of fun and teamwork. Two teams would be decided, and a tin would be kicked by a member of one gang. The other team would run off hiding. The tin-kicking gang had to find the others and bring them back to the tin. The trick was if one of your team that was hiding from the tin-kicking team managed to get back to the tin unfound, they could kick the tin and those who had been found could run off again. Hours and hours of laughs.

I grew up in an era of what felt like care-free innocence. Kids were still kids — picking on each other, arguing, and joking, but it always felt like sharing a chocolate bar afterwards made everything in the world okay. A good game of football could solve any disagreement, if not solve it, it would definitely divert a disagreement to another one about who was off-side or a brutal tackle. They were happy days when life felt like a daily adventure and, in some ways, we all slept better at night, adults and kids.

Traditions were important when I was growing up. There were routines and expectations that families and communities held. Sundays were a day of rest and shops weren't open. It was time for family, cooking, cleaning, relaxation, and also church for many. We weren't a religion-practising family so for us, the day was all about winding up the week and getting ready for the week ahead. Sunday was also bath day, and we would take turns getting a good wash before school the next day. I remember on Sunday mornings, Mam used to prepare the Sunday roast with the radio playing. She would hum along as music filled the house, Slim Whitman blasting out as Mam peeled and chopped vegetables and got the meat ready for our favourite meal of the week. Never a rush, just enjoying the process and producing delicious food that we all ate together.

Dad worked Monday-Friday so on a Sunday he was able to have tea with us as a family. He'd normally have a nap after tea then go to the club to share a few pints with friends. Dad was a good father, but like most men of that era, he didn't show a lot of emotion. It was how men were in the 1960s and 1970s and still are to some degree today, however, we knew we were cared for and loved. Mam was more affectionate but there was a lot of us to dish the love out to. Actions always meant more than words to us, and they still do for me now, as an adult and a father myself.

In the summer holidays, we would go away as a family. Coach trips for the odd day out here and there, or weeks away to Filey and holidays to Butlins. My parents booked trips through

the local coach company, Priory Travel, and it would be something for us all to look forward to as we counted down the days left at school. Playing out all day in the sun and being allowed to stay out late at night, before it eventually got dark, despite our energy still glowing. We would build go-carts out of any items we could find; anything we could use we utilised to build our winning vehicle.

Christmas Day was a time when all the kids from the estate would be out navigating their new, sparkling bikes through the streets. Seeing who had got which bike and wondering who could do the best tricks or go the fastest. We would build ramps and go speeding up to them, shooting off with no fear of falling. Great memories of childhood that still feel like yesterday.

Extract from DUTY by Jeff Stephenson

Available to buy on-line and in bookshops and via www.writeonthetyne.com

Meet the Slaters

To begin our story, let's go back in time to the nineteen twenties, which did not so much roar in North Shields but gently purred. Peter and Wilhelmina Slater were a married couple living in Gardner Street, close to Borough bank in the heart of the town. Every couple of years, a new baby expanded the family, which was neither rich nor poor, at least in the financial sense. The family was provided for by Peter, the head of the household and was managed by Wilhelmina, who ran things not just like clockwork, but with military precision.

First born was Peter, named not imaginatively, though lovingly after his dad. Curly haired 'little' Peter had a happy disposition and would play contentedly with his knitted rabbit. It was as if he knew he would soon have to share his mam's love with a troop of siblings who were as yet just a twinkle in their father's eye. It was not long before he relinquished his 'only child' status as Edith, or Edie as she was known, came to join him as his sister. Next in line was Jenny, 'Miss red hair, temper flare', who made her presence felt by letting everyone know when she wasn't happy.

Baby Wilhelmina was born in 1929. Her name was rather long for a little girl and was often subject to misspelling and mispronunciation; 'Willa' the shortened version was adopted and seemed just right. The bonny little girl with brown hair and jade green eyes was blessed with a calming temperament to help diffuse Jenny's fiery personality.

Next came Cyril, who Willa especially adored, and then there was Eddy. With so many mouths to feed, cooking, cleaning and mending clothes was an ongoing process without end. It is difficult to imagine how all of these tasks were carried out at a time before appliances and modern gadgetry.

Washing day could be any day, or some part of every day. White clothes were washed first, pounded in a wooden tub using a heavy poss stick then dragged out onto the scrubbing board. The collars and cuffs were scrubbed vigorously with green household soap and then the garments were boiled. Wilhelmina liked to use Dolly Blue bags for whiter whites, added to the final rinse for brighter finish.

Then came the next strenuous stage, the wringing out between the stiff rollers of the mangle. She would string the clothes on a line from her yard right over the back lane, and listen for the warning shout of 'coal!'

The coalman would bring his horse and dusty cart through, wash-day or not, and she would rush to move the clothesline aside. It was such hard work and enough to reduce her to tears if she didn't get there in time. The kitchen was the main hub of their home. There was always something bubbling away on the blackened range; vegetable broths, Pan Haggerty and bubble and squeak ensured no-one went hungry. It was a warm, happy place and lively with chatter until Wilhelmina shooed the little ones from under her feet.

Peter worked hard to support them all. He was a ferryboat bridgeman, employed by The Tyne Improvement Commission. Early in the morning before the first ferry service he would brave the freezing winds that pierced his hands and face like a hundred needles. He was responsible for the safe loading and unloading of the ferry at the landing dock. *The Northumberland* and *The Collingwood* were steam powered paddle boats which carried not only people but the horses and carts of rag and bone men and wagons loaded with casks of ale. Through the stiff, clanking turnstile the passengers would jostle, their boots thundered down the wooden jetty to the landing stage. Some were shipyard workers who tried to jump on before the boarding

ramp was fully lowered. The heavy chains clanked and clattered as it dropped into place. Out of the mens' pockets came Woodbine cigarettes manufactured locally at the Will's Factory and *roll your own baccy* tins. Greetings and enquiring shouts of,

'Alreet mate?' and 'What's yer fettle the day?' passed between friends and the gadgie who took your penny fare. The cabin would quickly fill with cigarette and pipe smoke and the sounds of hacking coughs and hissing engine noise.

Outside, thick black smoke belched from the huge funnel, its acrid smell lingering in the air far longer than it remained visible, dispersing into smoggy obscurity. The murky river was an eerie place in the absence of daylight. The black water swirled and steamed, waiting to claim anyone unfortunate to enter it, for hypothermia would surely precede the act of drowning. Failing that there was the potential of death from poisoning; pollution from the up-river Thomas Ness Works where seeping coal tar and oils leaked into the waters.

Vessel noise and warning blasts from horns echoed through the air and the monotone fog horn mournfully repeated itself on days of poor visibility. Blurred lights from boats that journeyed from the river's mouth gradually came into clearer view before fading once more on their upward passage to Newcastle.

The purple and amber glow of sunrise was always enough to raise the spirits of the shift workers with the suggestion of a bright, clear day ahead. Peter watched the seagulls that swooped around the trawler boats' catch, scavenging for breakfast. Some days the sunbeams dazzled and reflected off the river, the rays practically blinding and causing the eyes to strain in an effort to identify shapes. One such day he couldn't believe what he saw, rubbing his eyes in astonishment. But there was no mistaking the shape of an elephant lumbering across the bridgeway of the ferry landing. Travelling circus shows were popular at that time and the animals had to be transported from South Shields to North Shields as the shows moved pitch.

He couldn't wait to tell his children about it and was disappointed that they had missed such an unusual happening, for none of them had ever seen a real elephant. Later that day he wondered if he had imagined it, so bizarre was it to be confronted by this two-ton passenger. That evening, he gleefully related his story and wondered how the news would be received that the elephant's name was Jenny! Everyone started laughing at this until Jenny's thunderous expression changed the mood, and she ran from the room, slamming the door behind her. Clearly, she was not impressed about sharing her name with that animal.

Angela Craddock

Mr Seal in Cullercoats Bay

It had been 'scorchio' as my son liked to say. A sudden burst of warmth after an extendedly miserable winter. We decided that on our weekly swim we would ditch another layer (neoprene swimming costumes for those of you who are in 'the know'). We were going to be one step closer to 'full skins' with just our swimming cossies, gloves and boots between us and the beautiful North Sea — our 'oh so happy place'.

Now, you might have noticed that I said we. We are, myself and Gail. In life we meet so many people and connect over various things, but imagine meeting someone and becoming friends purely based on your love of swimming, being outdoors and loving nature? What joy! Gail is a joyful friend. We were introduced at Cullercoats at the end of the last decade. Our friendship has grown beyond the sea, but the water draws us back and together like a gentle wave on a summer's day. We swim, we laugh, we cry, then we spot birds, dolphins and more. We collect the cans that people throw off the pier on bank holiday weekends and we wave at the lifeboat as it comes in and out of the bay. This is Gail.

So — back to now. My kit packed, my sunglasses are on and on the spur of the minute I pick up my binoculars because I have a feeling today might be a dolphin day. I live a little to the west of the county in West Allotment, just a ten-minute drive from our favourite swim spot. As I drive along, I notice the unmissable haze towards the east. I know what this is. My old friend, the sea fret. The fine mist billows as if from a steam train, consuming the world in a white cloud. Today is **not** a dolphin day.

I spot Gail as I walk down the hill, wrapped up in her Smoc Smoc (a changing robe — hers a deep burgundy). There are a few persistent families determined to make the most of their day on the beach despite the weather. I reflect that most of them have probably come across from the sunny west. Of course, I am still wearing my sunglasses and flip flops- committed to our activity. We sit for a while and contemplate what we are about to do. We agree that swimming is a silly idea. Of course we swim. We always swim.

The saltwater stings and steals our breath. Gail stops and gasps, hands held above the water and eyes closed tight. I shift my focus to my own breath. Deeper from my lungs; I take control. Embracing the cold, it washes away my pain. Pushing forward, my arms reach out and pull. Like silk now, I move effortlessly. Processing the experience and allowing the pleasure, my body relaxes against the cold resistance. I give in to the sea. I feel strong and powerful. Yet I know she remains in charge; I am freely at her mercy. I am where I want to be. Gail catches up. Now I am with whom I want to be with. We swim out, out beyond the piers, and into the mist. With a wall of white ahead of us, we accept the slight danger of it all. I am reminded of the Famous Five and smile in reminiscence. Philosophy, pain, happiness, stress and life decisions are all on the cards, as musings and thoughts. We swim on together. Spotting a seagull pulling a blue bag from the water, we stop to watch.

'That's just awful,' tuts Gail.

'I know, let's swim across and … hang on, there's a seal ahead…,' I say, voice descending to a whisper.

'Do people not realise wha….' Continues Gail.

‘Gail, Gail…. Look - there is a seal.’

‘What are you saying?’

‘SEAL — Look.’ Pointing towards the seal, my voice becomes more urgent.

The waves lull slowly up and down, and the head of the seal is visible in the dips.

‘No, I think that’s a rock….’ whispers Gail.

‘A ROCK?! Since when has there been a rock right there in the middle like that?’

‘Ah, okay — Oh my goodness, it is a seal. He is just perfect.’

‘A seal, a seal. We have never seen a seal here for over a year. Oh wow…’ Our whispers fade.

Staring at the creature for a while, we appreciate his presence, respect his domain. He stares at us, nostrils wide and whiskers straight, for all the world, like a dog. Treading water, we watch him dip down. We know he could be swimming below us, observing from beneath, and we feel his dominance. Shortly he re appears further away, near the rocky shore, still staring he eventually disappears. Feeling a sense of overwhelming wellbeing and contentment, I sigh and float, looking up to the monochrome sky. Our coast is beautiful and abundant with life. We are privileged to dwell alongside its magnificence.

We swim away, back towards the shore, but not without squealing as we imagine Mr Seal nibbling and tickling our toes. Gail offers her arm as I slip on the dry sand. Returning to solid ground, we laugh with the pleasure of a shared adventure then shiver into warm clothes and remember our swim with Mr Seal.

Rachel Derrington

Early Memories

My early memories are of growing up on Longbenton estate in the 70s. My family and I; Mam, Dad and younger brother, lived at the bottom of Longbenton estate in the five storey, maisonette, council flats. There were about five blocks of flats in total and most of our school friends lived in the various blocks. We would all play out together at the back of the flats and the parents could keep an eye on us by just looking out of the window while we played our various games.

This was before the business parks were built, so all the land behind the flats were farm land where corn was grown and fields where the cows grazed. One day, a few of the cows escaped out of the field and came to the entrance of the flat to have a look around — much to the horror of some of the mums and their screams brought all the neighbours out to see what was going on!

The games we liked to play were two baller and skipping (although we used to get chased by a neighbour when we tied the skipping rope to the lamppost outside his house). We also liked to do handstands and practice various gymnastics moves that we had learnt at school.

All the neighbours were very friendly in our block and every New Year's Eve we would go into the next-door neighbours flat to celebrate the new year. It was exciting for me to be able to stay up until after midnight and it was the only time of year that I ever saw my mam a little bit tipsy after drinking a couple of glasses of Babycham. We also lit a bonfire every Guy Fawkes night at the back of the flat. We used to collect wood from all the neighbours and the dads would build the bonfire and light it. The neighbours would give any old furniture and wood that they didn't want and it would all be thrown on the bonfire and we would cook potatoes wrapped in tin foil in the fire. We didn’t have many fireworks, but were happy enough with a packet of sparklers each.

There was a mobile van that used to come around and if I was lucky, I would be given 10p, on occasion, to buy a ‘lucky bag’.

My nana, grandad and Aunty Linda used to live close by on the estate and we used to visit them regularly. They lived in a house with a back and front garden and I used to love looking at the flowers in the garden. My grandad used to grow fragrant roses, carnations, and large dahlias, and to this day, the smell of roses and carnations always takes me back to the hot summers of my childhood.

My nana was always baking and used to live in her floral apron. She taught me how to knit and crochet and every year she would make me a party dress for the various Christmas parties that I used to attend. I had a variety of multicoloured ponchos that she used to crochet for me out of scraps of wool and I used to feel very special and would look forward to see what she had created for me. She would save up her old rags, and I used to eagerly await the arrival of the rag man with his horse and cart. In exchange for the rags, the ragman would give us kids a balloon. Sadly, the balloon would usually have a tear in it, but on the occasions that it didn’t, my brother and I would play for hours chasing the balloon around the garden and I always felt sad when the balloon burst.

I attended Sommervyl school and the headmaster would play classical music in the morning school assemblies. I had never heard music like this before and thanks to him I was introduced to classical music at an early age and have an appreciation of it to this day. I saved up my pocket money and the first record that I ever bought was Tchaikovsky's, 1812 Overture, from the local Woolworths. I played it non-stop on the radiogram, and my dad, who had never heard it before, liked to hear it as much as I did.

A Saturday morning adventure for me would be to go out with my Aunty Linda on a trip to Killingworth to the shops where the Towers housing scheme once stood. We would get the double-decker bus and my aunty would pay my fare for me when the ticket collector came along. My aunty was very generous and she would always buy me a present of my choosing and some sweets from the shops.

Life in the flats was short-lived as the council decided to pull them down, meaning all the families had to be rehoused. We moved into a house with a garden and a few years later, the metro system opened and we had a station at the bottom of the street. We even had a garden shed full of interesting things that the previous tenants had left behind. The best find, as far as me and my brother were concerned, was a pair of wooden homemade stilts. All day long, we practiced walking up and down the garden from back to front. We must have made quite a racket as our poor neighbour, who worked nightshift, couldn't get any sleep because of the constant pounding sound made by the stilts on the ground.

At the back of the house was a school and, once a week, the local jazz band would practice on the field. I loved to listen to the band and watched from my bedroom window as they marched around the field. My granddad made me a 'band stick' from a broom shank with a Domestos bottle on top which I decorated with different coloured strips of tape. Many an hour, I would practice twirling the stick, throwing it up in the air, and catching it and marching around the back garden. A much quieter activity than walking on stilts, so I'm sure that the neighbours were happy when I took up this new activity.

I have nothing but happy memories of growing up living in North Tyneside and still live and work in the area.

Jacqueline Young

Banana Slide

One of the gates to Richardson Dees Park was as the bottom of a bank at the end of Park View. Just inside this gate was the perilous banana slide upon which, only the very daring or daft, would play. I shot off the end many times!

An innocent incline,

to the dribbling burn.

Silver winking,

crooking you near.

Up a cold paint-worn,

ladder of fear.

Mother's Pride waxed,

seat of your pants.

You're bulleted,

to the heart-stop,

brink of the slimy damn.

Gullet bursting vomit,

stifled, saving face.

You glory in rampant praise.

Julie Meredith

Eddie was a Biker

Eddie Alcock was my dad. He cycled to work from Woodbine Avenue in Wallsend to WD & HO Wills Cigarette Factory until it closed in 1986. He then worked for North Tyneside Council and cycled to the bin depot every day to collect his ‘barra’ to clean up the litter strewn streets of Wallsend.

Eddie was a biker,
he could pedal hell-for-leather.
His pac-a-mac a flapping,
as he battled in all weathers.

He’d peer out from beneath his brim,
as the wind would lash and whip.
And billow up his trouser legs,
‘til he got some ankle clips.

His first job was an errand boy.
His pride, he couldn’t mask it.
When he saw his black boneshaker,
complete with wicker basket.

He travelled roond and roond The Toon,
with a whistle and a grin.
The only disadvantage was,
the bike weighed more than him.

And he pedalled on all through the years,
with Highway Code proficiency.
And still today Ed can’t explain,
That Coast Road bike collision.
(‘Wimmin bikers!’ he sez!).

Now the cogs and chain are still,
you never would have thought,
that Eddie would run out of steam,
halfway to Rawdon Court.

He can't believe his rotten luck,
he shakes his head and tuts.
It's sad but true he has to pay,
full price on the bus.

Julie Meredith

59 David Street

Can I please Mam? Can I please go out to play?
Elbows on the windowsill,
net curtain at my back.
I'd kneel for ages, staring out,
all ready in my mac.

Can I please go out to play Mam?
Can I please go out to play?
I've got my mac and sour hat,
and wellies for the rain.

It was a giant of a puddle,
on the corner of our street.
From the gutter to the middle,
three miles wide and ten feet deep.

Can I please go out to play Mam? Can I please go out to play?
'Wait until the rain has stopped!'
I'd sigh and steam the pane and doodle,
till the sun came out, draw faces,
write my name.

Can I please go out to play Mam? Can I please go out to play?
I've got my mac and sour hat and wellies for the rain.
'Let me help you button-up then.
Be good, keep out of trouble'
And as I hugged her tight, she said,
'And don't go in that puddle.'

Julie Meredith

Gordon Square

Gordon Square stood at the end of David Street, opposite St Columba's Middle School on Elton Street. It was a square of flats with a central courtyard, three or four stories high with balconies around each level and elevated walkways. Life was tough there.

Four-storied balconies hugged,
a courtyard-cum-chimney.
Neighbours stood squinting,
from soft-sooted rails.
Keepsakes filched to the flames.

We'd knocked at their doors,
begging rags for the guy.
And carted him 'round,
on pram wheels bucked,
by the weight of his pennies.

For bonfire night's,
Jumping-Jack delights.
Catherine wheels pinned,
to the coalhouse doors,
on the bottom floor.

All eyes on our guy,
at the top of the stack.
As fire cracked,
at tossed-down sideboards,
lusting for his string-bound limbs.
His wonky grin, unflinching.

Julie Meredith

Playin Oot

Playin Oot is made up of the rhymes and games we used to play in the school yard or just outside.

The cat's got the measles,

so come all'ee all'ee-in.

Lengths of rainbow rubber bands,

snapping at your shins.

Higher and higher,

as far as you can run.

And back in time to skip the rope,

cos you're the only one.

Ring-a-ring o'playtime,

a pocketful of rye.

Turn your face to the wall again,

or all the children die.

Buttercups and daisy chains,

to Old King Tutt.

What's the time Mr Wolf?

It's blind man's buff.

3 – 6 – 9,

the goose drank wine.

Playing 2-balls,

we're clapping in time.

From Jacks to Colditz,

look out here's the axe!

Conkers or Clackers?

Keeping off the cracks.

Ee-aye-adee-oh,

the bone gets hit.

Spin the bottle – Skinshees,

you are it!

Julie Meredith

Sandcastle Competition

We had a day's coach trip from St. Columba's Church, Wallsend, to the seaside Cullercoats every year in the summer holidays. The Church Hall was always booked in case it rained; we never needed the church hall! In the days of a propa sandcastle competition – nee sculptures or nowt!

It's teetering rather than towering,
sturdy yet slightly cockeyed.
The flag's a balloon with a hole in,
that I fished from the froth of the tide.

The drawbridge is a cheese pastie,
that I dropped after only a lick.
The crab claw a menacing sentry,
the portcullis is lollipop sticks.

I queue at the van for some winkles,
ten pence but you get a free pin.
As I glance back my chances of winning,
are lost in one helluva din.

The attack is the end of my castle,
a ruthless campaign from all sides.
The dog and the seagull do battle,
the pastie too tempting a prize.

Julie Meredith

THE MEM: Dancing Days

The Memorial Hall became just a fond memory when my dancing career ended in about 1974. I had taken part in many competitions since joining Casey's Dance Studio on Station Road, Wallsend in 1963, at the age of three. My teacher, whom I adored, was Ethel Abela, who went on to open her own dancing studio in Willington Quay with her husband Peter. It's still there to this day 'Abela's Dance Studio' but Casey's has long since gone from Station Road. (I think they were called Raymond and Dorothy Casey.)

I remember Mam taking me up the Mem's cold stone staircase with its ornate wrought iron handrail into the hubbub of the ballroom, alive with the joy of twirling dancers with painted-on grins. Dresses would be heavily sequined atop multi-layered underskirts flouncing rhythmically as they were spun by leading partners in bow ties and tails*. Black shiny brogues fleckerled with silver strappy sandals at high speed on the feet of the more advanced dancers on the slippery, powdered dancefloor.

(Or matching dresses, but the 'lead' always wore the competition number safety-pinned to their back).*

However, as a fourteen-year-old in the 1970s, it was extremely uncool to do ballroom dancing, and I gave it up. I remember going to a disco at the Mem when I was fifteen or sixteen. I had waited in vain for a new pair of shoes to come from Brian Mills' catalogue in time for the disco. They were purple suede with a 2-inch heel, very trendy! But they arrived too late.

Wallsend Writers Group

The Memorial Hall obviously missed me and fell into disrepair over the next decade or so. But I was drawn back again in my late twenties as a member of Wallsend Writer's Group. We originated in 1988 at 'Wallsend Community Action' on Charlotte Street. By 1991, we had moved into the newly refurbished 'People's Centre' situated on the ground floor of Wallsend Memorial Hall on Frank Street and we continued to meet there every Wednesday morning, publishing several 'Launch' magazines filled with our poetry and short stories.

Return to The Mem Ballroom

In 1996 I had to sacrifice my Wednesday mornings with Wallsend Writers when I started to work full time for the Alzheimer's Disease Society in North Shields as the office administrator. There I met "No.1 Volunteer", Ken Hanson who, c2000, had his 60th birthday party at Wallsend Memorial Hall. It was to be a ceilidh with the wonderful Deadly Earnest Ceilidh Band featuring Ben Hudson, a keen musician and support worker with Alzheimer's Society (as it had become). This was my first time back in the ballroom since my

dancing days. It was beautifully clean and bright, if a bit gaudy with red walls and pillars and bright white and gold decoration on the ceiling, dados and plaster cornices.

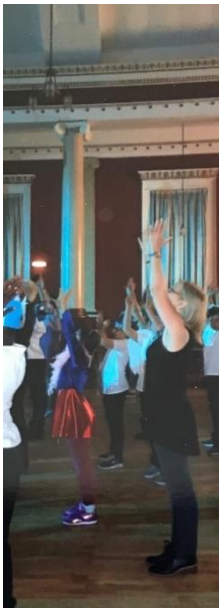
Of course, my memory of the dancing competitions are all in black and white! It could well have been painted the same colours, but somehow I doubt it! The floor, though — well, that was absolutely perfect; beautifully restored, sprung and polished. It really did make me stop and take a deep breath in admiration.

Halloween

Jump to October 2016 and my next rendezvous with Wallsend Memorial Hall: I have a niece and a granddaughter now and character parties have become the must-go-to activity. 'Wish Upon A Star' were lucky to have Cinderella, Princess Belle, Elsa & Co. from Frozen, Spiderman, Optimus Prime and many more on their books. But this was a Halloween party and the Addams Family were presiding in my favourite haunt; The Memorial Hall. The red and white décor now seems quite fitting for a hall filled with happy ghouls and boys.

Heartbeat Ballroom–November 2018

Then came the callout to the folk of Wallsend to take part in a music video. North East based folk singer, Katie Doherty, and her band The Navigators, were looking for anyone with a connection to Wallsend Memorial Hall, where the video was to be made, to come along, learn a short dance routine and be forever captured in their recording of Heartbeat Ballroom. They had enlisted the children of Richardson Dees Primary School for the main body of dancers and they had taken part in workshops with the band in preparation. I took my mam and granddaughter, Ellie along and we spent a day rehearsing, over and over, for a thousand takes (it seemed). We were invited to wear something sparkly; I had a black silky vest with silvery decoration around the neckline and Ellie chose to wear her shiny Supergirl dress, which she accessorised with a pink feather boa! Mam had to sit it out eventually but enjoyed watching and reminiscing about our previous dancing adventures at The Mem. You can see the video of Heartbeat Ballroom on YouTube; we can be spotted near the end thanks to Ellie's feather boa, but don't blink!



♫ So take my hand, can't you hear the band?
This dance was ours back then, I remember when there was no tomorrow … ♫

The Present Day–May 2024

For the last couple of years, I have been mam's carer and I accompany her to appointments, shopping and lunch clubs. Like it says in my poem, Friday's lunch club is held at our old friend, The Wallsend Memorial Hall.

I take my mam to The Mem on a Friday.
I'm her carer, she has her lunch there.
We wait for the lift to the Tyne Suite,
where once we'd dance up the stone stairs.

A white dress, it's nineteen sixty-seven,
the photos were all black and white.
A red sash and red and green netting,
and a badly cut fringe. What a sight!

We did our best waltz and came second!
Had our photograph took with the mayor.
We did Cha-Cha-Cha to a rumba,
When you're seven, you really don't care.

left: Julie Alcock and Heather

With the mayor and mayoress of Wallsend

Julie Meredith (Alcock / Astbury)

MY FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

Was it really that long ago, September 1957? Sixty-five years have passed and the memories are still glowing. It was such an ease of passage commencing infant school as my oldest brother had started two years prior, so I had known what lay ahead.

I was five years old and we lived next door to one of the teachers (Auntie Mary), plus I was good playmates with one of her daughters (Christine) who was a year older than me. Mam had prepared me well as I could read, and we had regular spelling tests. It truly was a breeze, the most carefree time of my life.

My birthday was 13th September and I can recall the class singing “Happy Birthday” and blowing out a candle on top of a tin, inside of which were Dolly Mixtures sweeties. First year children at the infant school St Columba’s were taught by Miss Edgar and she was simply perfect in my eyes. Never did I think at that tender age that one day I too would be a ‘Miss Edgar’, encouraging children to fulfil their potential.

The blackboard and duster played key roles in a school day to aid in learning the alphabet ABC and counting 123. The best time of day was story telling when we sat in the designated reading area and heard some great adventures. To this day, reading and listening to stories is one of my favourite hobbies. I only have to hear the words, ‘*Once upon a time’* and I am right back to those happy days.

Playtime in the classroom when the weather was bad would see me heading for the pretend shop where I would serve the customers. We had a sandpit too to have fun in. The school yard was divided in two: half for the girls and half for the boys. Running, skipping, and ball games to use up all that youthful energy. There was no school uniform in those days, but I remember feeling so smart in my new shoes. Free milk was given out daily to everyone.

It was a ten-minute walk to school and we came home for lunch. My street, Laburnum Avenue, was full of children, so one was never alone or lonely. Buggies was a shop next to the school which sold sweets. It was like paradise! So much choice: pink sherbets, penny chews, fruit gums, wriggly worms, etc.

Even at that tender age, I could see that the teachers in the higher classes were formidable and I never wanted to leave the ‘baby’ class.

Thank you, Miss Edgar, for making my first day of school so memorable.

NOTE: the school is still standing, albeit in a much-reduced state, and serves the community well as church hall and car park.

Marie Rice

North Shields

The wind carries the mist that rolls along the River Tyne. It creeps its way up the banks into the coastal town of North Shields, shroud-like and desolate. Bedford Street, the shopping epicentre, is a man-made wind tunnel, an urban canyon, though this is rather too grand a description for a place in a *town where no town ought to be.* Please don't think of it as a loveless location, or without history or nostalgia, or one that has ceased to matter, for nothing could be further from the truth. Now a shadow of its former self, it was once a bustling, vibrant hub, whose very fabric has frayed over the years, leaving behind only the threads of a place that once celebrated unity and glory.

Life began here at the Pow Burn tributary at a cluster of temporary riverside shelters, or 'shiels' that were built for fishermen whose livelihood depended on the river and the North Sea. The area was developed with a bakery and a brewery, and the later creation of a fish quay. There were jealous attempts by the mayor of Newcastle and his rabble to halt the success and prosperity of the town. They perceived that the little town by the mouth of the river was hindering trade opportunities at the larger port.

Some houses and a newly built mill were burnt down; those acts instigated a series of successful lawsuits which decreed that the area could not be targeted and plundered. Despite ongoing and determined efforts to overpower and overthrow, the town clung on to its identity.

By the mid-1850s, North Shields was a port with an established rail link, a manufacturing town with a local source of coal, and a retail centre. The advent of the steam-age and the development of heavy industry in the region endorsed and augmented its sense of identity. *The town where no town ought to be* has survived for eight centuries and is a testament to the canny folk who bear to it such affection and allegiance.

Angela Craddock

Shopping in North Shields

Cinemas and theatres were not all that North Shields had in abundance, as the town boasted a variety of quality shops where you could buy almost anything without having to travel to Newcastle. D. Hill Carter and Co Hill Carter made all kinds of seamen's and fisherman's boots, and the company was established in 1825 as Dennis Hill's Drapery. The store expanded into upholstery and carpeting and grew into a store in Union Street that *catered for the needs of the home and every member of the family*. There was a cafe that is fondly remembered by the older folk of the town who enjoyed the constantly changing river scene framed by the large glass windows.

A large range of departments were advertised; silk mercer, millner, hosier and costumiers were just some of the specialist goods that were available. A newspaper advert boasts the claim that since 1849, discerning housewives have shopped at Hill Carters. *We have devoted ourselves to providing the highest quality merchandise at the most reasonable prices. We study the needs and demands of the public and our staff are always ready to oblige in their well known, courteous manner. For quality and service, we advise you, without delay, to visit.* The store developed a high reputation in the area and many of its well-trained staff went on to found their own businesses.

Belle Brothers was a department store in Bedford Street that sold a range of ladies' fashions, baby linen, toys, footwear and household goods. There was also a ladies' hairdressing salon situated on an upper floor. The juniors would sweep the floor and remove all the dust covers before the doors opened. Each department had a senior assistant who taught the junior who could only approach a customer if the senior allowed them to. There was a sale once a year and people queued outside, right along Wellington Street. The management provided tea for them and the assistants made a note of items to be reserved in case everyone rushed in and they missed their turn. There was an overhead pulley system throughout the store where payments were placed in canisters that whooshed through a pneumatic tube system to the accounts office. Bell Brothers also operated a token system, a currency that could only be spent in store, and a credit system where the customer paid extra money back each week.

Walkers: *The House of Quality* was established in 1880, occupying a corner site on Borough Road, opposite the Labour Exchange. Their advert read, '*Everything to wear, and for the home. It has always been, and always will be our earnest endeavour to give Good Quality and Good Service'* They offered items on 'appro', for approval or sanction, meaning that you could decide at home if you wanted to keep the goods before returning them or making payment.

In Saville Street, the shop windows were always lit up at night. Woods the Tailor, Globe Boot Shop with double window display of every type of shoe imaginable; leather shoes, plimsolls, sandals, and hobnail boots. Inside the shop was a chaotic mixture of shoes and boxes and an overwhelming smell of rubber and cardboard. Graham's Furniture Store sold all kinds of good quality furniture and kitchen units, and many newlyweds would furnish their first homes from their wide range of quality stock. Woolworths on Saville Street west opened in 1930 and sold a variety of goods from self-serve counters. You could buy a bag of broken biscuits or choose your favourite sweets from the pic and mix counter. At the back of the store, the 'Avery's Personal Weighing Machine' allowed you to 'try your weight' by standing on the footplate and putting a penny in the slot.

Angela Craddock

Sunday Excursion

Toodle- le- doo, Toodle- le- doo, Toodle- le-doo.
Listen for the steam train, hear the steam train,
huffing, puffing, chuffing, rushing through.
Past the terraced houses grimy.
Past the murky Tyne so slimy.
Clickety-clacking over the tracking,
up the gradients never slacking.
Whistle blowing, now it's slowing,
down the line a red light glowing.
On the platform children stand,
spades and buckets in their hand.

'Mind the edge, now stand well back.
You'll get your Sunday dress all black.'
Mother shoos her little darlings,
who chatter and twitter like noisy starlings.
'Here it comes. Now do be quick.
I hope our Maisie won't be sick.'
A swirl of smoke and a hiss of steam,
announces our train: The Northern Queen.
Dark green engine with trappings of gold,
its plum-coloured carriages the people to hold.

'Be sharp Jimmy, up you get, watch out with that fishing-net.
Carry the bag, don't bang the flask. What time's the train back? I forgot to ask.'
Clash clatter, clash clatter, the doors slam shut,
the signal-man peers from out of his hut.
The hands on the clock say quarter-to-ten,
a whistle blows we're off again.

Wallsend, Howdon, Willington Quay,
it won't be long till we reach the sea.
Percy Main, North Shields, then Cullercoats,
'Look at all those fishing boats!'

Four noses press against the glass,
Whitley Bay! We're here at last.
Our tickets are punched by the man in black,
Mother enquires what time we come back.
Over the bridge we clatter and stamp,
hopping and jumping we run down the ramp.
Out in the sunshine we skip holding hands,
off in the distance we spy golden sands.
Headlong we rush, so eager to reach,
the myriad of things to do at the beach.

The tide's ebbed, leaving rock-pools bare,
off runs Jimmy some crabs to snare.
On the foreshore donkeys bide,
sweet little foals by their mother's side.
Each bridle painted with a name,
our Maisie pays sixpence to ride on Flame.
Anxious mother watches all,
'Don't let it trot, you're bound to fall!'
Father lies beached like a washed-ashore whale,
guarding our clothes, the spades and a pail.

While twins Ben and Dan, paddle then dash,
from the foam-capped waves that chase and splash.
Spewing sea-wrack upon the sands,
we burst its pods with eager hands.

‘Maisie! Ben! Jimmy! Dan!
Come get your lunch, it’s eggs or Spam.’
Up the beach we scamper and run,
bodies all pinkening from the sun.
On the towels we sit and munch,
sand-smeared sandwiches for our lunch.

Whilst swooping and crying overhead,
two gulls fight to steal our bread.
Ginger-pop finished, sandwiches ate,
the gulls get the crusts left on the plate.
There we sat, sandy and damp,
banned from swimming in case of cramp.
This; mother warned, would be our fate,
if we took a dip after eating late.
So, we whiled away our day,
on the sands at Whitley Bay.
Building castles, burying Dad.
Oh! What happy times we had.

Madelaine Simpson

Elephants are Good

I grew up in Killingworth, North Tyneside, in the 1980s. My memory of childhood is full of laughter, fun, friendship, and family. My happiest memories are those spent with my dad, mam, and brother. I had lots of friends at school and out of school, all different ages. However, most of my time was spent playing games with my brother and days out with Mam and Dad.

Those memories are the ones that I hold closest to my heart. I cherish the memories — it's all I have left of my parents. My dad died when I was ten and my mam when I was thirty-two. I wish I had more photos, nicknacks, family treasures. I have a small collection of photos to look back on my childhood to be grateful for.

My brother and I live each day knowing that we had the best childhood our parents could give us. Whilst we didn't have lots of money, we never went without. If my parents had no money, the weekend would be spent driving somewhere or doing something like a trip to the coast or a game of football with Dad. We would play football on the field: Dad, me, and my brother. Then, one by one, our friends would appear, and all would want to play football with my dad. He was a big kid at heart.

Dad worked away. When he came home from weeks of working abroad or down south, he would bring us gifts. We never knew what it would be. Sometimes it would be the biggest bag of conkers you'd ever seen. Other times it would be a VHS, full of recorded episodes of The Simpsons or WWF (Wrestling) that he could access having sky TV where he was working. A memory of my dad that will never go is the big grey mustache he had. He would kiss me and my brother, knowing we'd laugh and run away from the bristles against our faces.

At weekends, I would watch my dad build me things. He would build us anything from a go-kart to a castle to use as a fortress for our He-Man figures. My dad could build anything — he didn't do it to save money or because he couldn't afford it. He wanted to create something for us and took great enjoyment of building over-the-top sized toys that we could show off to our friends. He built the world's biggest rabbit hutch once summer! It filled the garden and before long we had 20-30 rabbits living in it. Mam used to clean it out. We would try to help, knowing what a task it would be. I never remember my mam asking us to help, we just wanted too. We wanted to be together.

My dad was a joiner by trade, but could turn his hand to anything and would do so to make sure he was making a living and providing for his little family. If he wasn't working in Germany or down south, he would be working in the North East. I have memories of picking

my dad up in the car with Mam from the shipyards. I'm not sure what he did there. He was always happy to see us with a great big smile, duffle coat, dirty jeans, dirty boots, an old rucksack, and a prickly kiss to follow.

Dad would have little sayings and funny jokes that he would tell, knowing me and my brother would laugh and want more of them. The main one that remains in my memory is a saying. To this day, I don't know why or where it came from, but me and my brother loved it — 'Elephants are good.'

After my dad died, our mam came into a little bit of money. You'd think we had won the lottery, despite the big loss of Dad. We were bought the latest fashion, the newest games console, a holiday of a lifetime to Orlando. It was my mam's way of protecting us and giving us everything we had ever wanted. All I ever wanted was a family, and it was taken away from me at a young age.

Growing up in the North Tyneside turned us from a family of four to three. My mam raised us the only way she knew how; she showered us with love. My mam was my best friend and I'm sure my brother would say the same. We had our holidays and weekends away, but North Tyneside was always home. After Dad died, we moved house and made new memories — just the three of us.

In some ways, I feel as if my dad lives on in my brother. They are so alike, especially in appearance. The only department I take after my dad is my ability to turn my hand to most DIY tasks without hesitation and enjoy my woodwork. Whilst my brother takes after my dad, I take after my mam, which I will be forever thankful for; she had the biggest heart.

North Tyneside is my home. I have memories that will last a lifetime. Driving through the region, I will often look out the window and smile. Smile with a memory of being loved. I have so many happy memories of the fields, the buildings, and the coastline. Growing up in North Tyneside is also something I'll be forever thankful for.

Paul

Whitley Bay Ice Rink

When we were kids, we would go to the ice rink at Whitley Bay. It was always busy; kids screaming and shouting, joking and laughing. Me and my older brother and younger sister loved it. Mam would sit on the hard, plastic seats, stomping her feet to try and keep the heat moving around her body as she breathed on her hands and rubbed them frantically together as if two twigs trying to create a spark of fire.

We'd shout at her as we skated round, 'Mam, Mam, look!' Frantically waving at her as if seeing her for the first time in a month.

She would beam back at us, clapping at our ability to stay up on the ice. But it never lasted long. One of us would fall, possibly cry, come off the ice for a bit and maybe have some chips smothered in tomato sauce and drowning in vinegar. Medicine in potato form, before we'd be off again to brave the danger of the North East Pole in Whitley Bay!

By the time we left, we were boiling with sore feet from the bowling-ball weight boots that never seemed to fit correctly and stunk of rubber and sweat. Mam, on the other hand, would be tinged with blue and she would blast the heater in the car on the way home as soon as the engine warmed up.

'When can we go again?' One of us would ask.

'In a few weeks,' Mam would patiently answer.

'Yesss!' we would exclaim before talking about our comics or TV.

Now I take my own daughter and son ice skating every now and then. And I'm Mam, sat on those seats that I think have never changed, freezing, waving, and smiling at my precious kids. And now I know how cold it was for Mam, but how grateful she would have been to see us having fun — just like I am seeing my two. And that love is always enough to keep me warm.

Emma

Called (extract)

I think back to the house we lived in until I was eleven years old. It was in Church Street, Coach Open, Willington Quay; a house which, for a long while, had been marked out for demolition to make way for the new Tyne Tunnel. It was at the end of a row of shops, so that was really convenient for us. It was a happy home, despite the fact that houses then had no central heating.

In winter, you could scrape your name into fronds of ice on the bedroom windows with a fingernail, and also watch your breath billow out in a fleeting, misty cloud — these upstairs rooms were a real contrast to the one downstairs, as there was always a good fire in the hearth. Lighting our fire, though, from scratch could be risky. The fire itself was initially lit using crumpled paper, sticks, and coal. To speed the job up, an open newspaper was held against an upright shovel, which balanced on the fender, as a blazer to get a draught going underneath. Sometimes the newspaper caught fire if we didn't spot it quickly enough turning brown! This practice was so well-rehearsed, but it caused some anxiety on my part as it seemed fraught with danger, and I would watch the paper like a hawk.

Then my parents proudly invested in an all-night burner. Because of this, our fire could now be banked up at night with coal dust and the draught flap shut down for the night. In the morning, all that was needed for a blazing fire was to pierce the coal surface with a poker and open the flap slightly at the bottom, and voilà, there it was. Heat, glorious heat! Of course, fires as efficient as ours caused a lot of soot to gather in the chimney and that's when the chimney sweep, with his black face and his dirty flat cap, would pay us a visit.

Our back yard was typical of houses then; small and compact, with two outbuildings. Someone before we lived there had cemented shards of glass bottles into the top of our high brick wall to keep trespassers out, just outside the back door — it was a scary sight. One out-building was a coal-house, which held coal in place with fitted planks of wood, and on one occasion, we discovered a wild-looking cat hiding inside, with her batch of kittens. She hissed and snarled at us on opening the door, so we stayed clear of them all until someone came to remove them.

This brings me to the outdoor loo, right next to the coal-house, with its torn-up newspaper pieces hanging on string from a hook on the wall. These papers were an early substitute for loo roll, which, of course, hadn't yet been invented. Izal toilet rolls soon came onto the market, (its paper supposedly kinder to the skin and less ink on it) but believe me, wiping was still very much an unpleasant experience, unless you crumpled the paper up first. Dad kept an old paraffin lamp lit in there in winter to keep the water in the loo from freezing. A cunning plan!

Lifting the latch of our back door brought us into the backyard and straight into our small kitchen. Outside of its window, a long grey tin bath hung neatly on the wall. We did occasionally bathe in it, but the several kettles of hot water which were poured into it didn't stay warm for very long. A 'modern' Ascot heater on the kitchen wall gave us instant hot water, but we used it sparingly. Two massive old brown leather chairs squatted like sentinels by the fire in the main living room. They were so cosy, and I loved snuggling up beside my dad on the one nearest the fireplace. A large cupboard lay to the right of the fire. I remember the bamboo wallpaper which decorated the walls. It was fashionable then and kept our living room fenced

in — all around, most jungle-like. And I remember the table where we sat for our meals; Joan and I having to race around it once or twice to dry the calamine lotion which had been dabbed on our spots, whatever spots they were. I still can't understand how Joan and I got those spots at exactly the same time. We seemed to share everything, even a single finger of Kit Kat biscuit at tea time. One sister would cut it in two, the other chose which half they wanted. Mam got one too, and Dad the remaining two! After all, he was the breadwinner.

Life was such fun for us as we grew, and my sister and I were free spirits. We could go anywhere outside, as long as we were back in time for tea. We would walk right across to East Howdon, down wagon ways, and once we even ventured along the Lonnen, which was a very isolated path. I remember the excitement of going through the pedestrian tunnel, which ran right under the River Tyne and was situated across the road from our house. Once inside, my sister and I would race to the point which marked out the borderline between the two counties; Northumberland and Durham, to see who was the first to stand astride it, and claim possession of both counties at once. I loved the echoes our voices made down there. We would run on to the Jarrow side, yelling at the top of our voices and then turn back and do it all over again.

Joan and I would sometimes visit the local cinema, the Pearl, to watch films and cartoons on Saturdays. Some children called it 'The Lop,' a fleapit! (Strangely enough the Norwegian and Danish word for flea is 'loppe'!) These shows were known as matinees and I remember the children all stamping their feet like fury if the projector ever broke down, especially in the middle of a good cowboy film, starring Hopalong Cassidy or Roy Rodgers! Some children even threw peanuts.

Often, we went fishing with nets by that former hotel for tiny brown shrimps in a little stream, known to us as the Cundy. We would drop our catch into jam jars full of water — sometimes the catch consisted of frog spawn. We were able to observe the amazing transformation of tadpoles' growing legs on our very own kitchen window sill. It's strange though. Once the four legs grew and the tail shrank, we never saw them again. They must have disappeared with the fairies, too!

In winter, we would slide down a snowy pit heap on the opposite side of the Cundy, clinging to our sledges and sometimes we ended up in it, with soaked bottoms. I saw a pure white stoat there once, at that time of year. Sometimes, we picked wildflowers to take home — but never dandelions, or 'pittleybeds' as we called them, for we were told that if you picked them, you would wet the bed, and we certainly didn't want to do that!

When the month of November drew near, local lads guarded our bonfire (our 'bonner') in case it got raided. The raids could come from anywhere really, but mainly from the East Howdoners. (Come to think of it, many of our cousins lived in East Howdon.) But boy, did we enjoy those bonfire nights, while our parents watched on. "Penny for the Guy" was a common cry in those days, just before November 5th, as children begged for coins in order to buy their fireworks. The poor Guy looking so forlorn, would be placed onto the top of the large bonfire just before it was lit. I still remember the terror of a jumping Jack, cracking and exploding at

our heels. The hypnotic sight of a Catherine wheel nailed to a post whizzing around and sometimes getting stuck and rockets shooting up into the night sky with a whoosh or a whistle. What a contrast the next morning, when we hurried to the same spot to see ashes and charred wood lying there, smouldering together.

These were the days of free milk at school playtimes — milk that turned to white ice in winter, and it often curdled on a hot summer day. These were carefree days when we had such freedom and played imaginative, sometimes hair-raising games for hours on end. And these were the days of careful spending and of the family budget box, where wages would be ceremoniously placed into dockets so that every bill could be paid. I still feel a warm wave of nostalgia looking back on those blissful days. Life then was uncomplicated, secure, predictable even, and lived at such a leisurely pace.

Extract from the memoir, Called by Sheila Hamil. Available to purchase from Amazon.
www.sheilahamil.co.uk

Rising Sun Memories

I lived in Rising Sun Cottages from the age of six until the age of twenty-three, and must say, looking back, I have only happy memories. Rising Sun Cottages was the row of pit houses which backed onto the pit yard. Below are a few of my memories of life back then.

Jack Hamil: My dad, Jack Hamil, started at the pit as an apprentice fitter in 1932 and ended up as the unit engineer. He stayed at the Rising Sun until it closed in 1969. As an engineer, he had to stay on for a while after its closure to make sure the site was safe. In my early years, in the 50s, mines were becoming more mechanised by the introduction of the 'Shearer' for hewing, or cutting the coal. I must say that this machine's name was not popular in our house, as was the Shearer years later who was idolised by so many in footballing circles. With no phone in the house, Dad was often disturbed by a pitman banging on our bedroom window in the middle of the night with a clothes prop, to let him know that there was a problem at work. More often than not, this was to tell him that the Shearer had broken down. This was a regular occurrence and my dad would go days with very little sleep.

Sunday Afternoon Visits: It was common for families to have a Sunday get together after a hard week's work. Everyone would be dressed in their 'Sunday best' and Mam would bake for tea. I still remember that wonderful aroma of cakes and scones. The highlight of the afternoon, for male relatives visiting our house, was a visit to the pit. The visit would normally include The Time Office, Pit Baths, Blacksmith's Shop and the Winder Room. The real treat was the Winder Room (if you are into health and safety, skip the next bit).

The winder man would give us a demonstration of the workings of the cage (lift), which transported the men up and down the coal shaft. This included the dead man's brake, which was a means of stopping the cage if it should run out of control. He informed us that this was not a very popular way of stopping a cage when full of men. The men preferred their stomachs to stay just above their hips and not visit, be it only for a short time, their throats. The cage took the form of a yo-yo in the shaft. The air would then be rather blue when the men reached the safety of the surface.

Then there was the treat! My cousins and I were often invited to take a trip down the shaft to see the ponies. The pony's stable was at the base of the shaft. They were well cared for with the best of food. We loved those visits and the skill of the winder man meant there wasn't a mark on us when we returned to the surface for tea.

The Lone Ranger: A friend of mine who lived in the Cottages was Michael Coulson. He was a little older than me and of the generation where sons usually followed their dad down the pit. Michael had a job working with the ponies. Man and pony often became great friends down there. After all, they spent so much time together. One of the rules down the pit was that you must not ride the ponies, but lads of 16-17 years of age loved to get from the pit face to the stables at the end of their shift, bareback riding. According to Michael, the manager took great pleasure in handing out fines to any lad caught riding the ponies. Once they felt the fresh air on their faces, they needed little encouragement to gallop. Since a galloping pit pony took some stopping, the lads were often caught by a gaffer and

reported to the manager. Michael would have to report to the manager's office on payday to pay his fine. The call was often heard,

'Send the Lone Ranger in!'

I'm sure the manager found it hard to contain his smile, and Michael didn't mind at all paying for his bit of fun.

Bob the Copper: All pits had their security man or 'pit copper'. Ours at the Rising Sun Colliery was 'Bob the Copper'. Us lads from the Cottages made him earn his money, for the pit yard was the best adventure playground any boy could dream of. We had trucks, coal tubs, massive piles of pit props, a pit heap, the pithead baths…. I could go on! It was like Disney World before its time, only not as clean and colourful. We never did any damage, but boy did we have some fun! We always imagined that Bob the Copper's job was to stop us having fun, for he tended to wait until we were in full flow, either building a den with the props, or racing in the tubs before he would appear. We would soon scatter and then re-group, ready for our next adventure after checking who had got caught.

On one occasion, I took a friend from school to play on the tubs. As was the norm, Bob the Copper turned up. Unfortunately, my friend didn't have the experience of us lads from the Cottages and he got caught, whereas I took off like Jessie Owen. This friend gave my name to Bob the Copper as the escapee and I knew I'd be reported to my dad, so I expected a telling off. At tea that night, there was a definite air of expectancy at our table. What would my dad say? He never had to say much, ever… I always got the message. But on this occasion, he was quite brief.

'You've been playing in the pit yard again!' (a statement, not a question)

'Bob says you're getting faster!'

I later went on to represent Northumberland at the All-England Athletic Championships. So, a big thank you to Bob the Copper for all the good training.

The Gold Mine (better known as Ernie's Hut): The Rising Sun may have produced some coal in its time, but Ernie Gustard's Hut (shop) was a regular gold mine! Ernie had a little wooden hut which was positioned on the side of the road leading away from the pit. From the hut, Ernie would sell the men their cigarettes and tobacco. He had a book in which he recorded the 'tick' the men had accrued — no money would pass hands until payday. Then, on Friday, the men settled up immediately after getting paid. So much for handing the pay packet to their wives.

Ernie knew them all by name, and what their daily requirements were. Hardly a word needed to be spoken, and the men rarely broke stride as they picked up their daily 'ration' on the way home. Ernie also found time to run the Colliery Welfare football team. The lads from the cottages helped him to mark out the football pitch for the Saturday match, using sawdust sent over from the pit workshop to mark out the lines and a mound of sawdust for both penalty spots. Ernie probably had many more gifts than I, as a young lad, could realise. He did, on many occasions, oil and prepare my cricket bat, nail the studs in my football boots and lace up my size 5 'caser' (my leather football).

Pit Family: The people who lived in the pit cottages were just like one big, happy family. My friends were the sons and daughters of Jack Turner, Chucks Geary, Ben Robinson, Harry McHale and little Bobby Coulson, to name a few. Because there was a mining

community spirit, they were all aunties and uncles to me. In my dad's later years, he would still visit the 'Top Club', known now as the 'Barking Dog', a name given to it because the sports field was used as the venue for whippet racing. He went three times a week to play dominoes with former pit colleagues, Bill Peary and Jackie Tubman, and of course, have a couple of pints with them.

The Local Chapel: I can still remember my Sunday school anniversary piece from when I was four years old, most likely handed to me as the son of a miner.

Down deep dark mines below the ground,
where fathers and brothers' toil.
They dig for coal to warm our homes,
and make our kettles boil.

God bless the men that dig the coal,
and work in cheerless gloom.
And when their daily toil is done,
God bring them safely home.

When my dad died in 2003, I had to inform the National Coal Board of his passing. I finished my letter off by stating that I was proud to be the son of a miner, and that will never alter.

Bob Hamil

V is for VICTORY

Triggered by random thought, memories arise. I have no memory of the air-raid shelters being built, but one day; they were there. Red bricked, concrete roofed and safe. Dad at the ship yard making ships. Or wearing the tin hat that years afterwards lay in the cupboard under the stairs for no other reason than 'just in case.'

Birthdays and Christmases came and went with cake and toys. Aunty Lilly spreading the news that Gilchrest's had potatoes. Mam hurrying off to queue and returning with her basket full of earthy treasure. 'There is a war on you know.' An oft repeated mantra.

School was started. Windows crisscrossed with tape and sandbags piled. The formidable Miss Green calling Mam in to apologise. She was sorry, but I could not be dissuaded. I would always be left-handed. The siren whined. Warm clothes grabbed to dash into the darkness. Blackout curtain drawn across the shelter door. In holders fashioned from National Milk tins, candles were lit, sending smokey messages across the walls. Dropping to sleep amid the speculation.

'Hope it's going to be alright. Hope it'll soon be over.' Sleepy eyed, bundled back home when the all clear sounded

Laughter. Running, hide and seek and skipping ropes. Keeping out of the way of big boys who teased and wanted to play football.

The night Mam cried. The broken glass, the kitchen covered in a thick blanket of soot. Smiles when the canary was discovered under the table alive and well. Flags and bunting found from somewhere.

Tables balanced precariously on the cobbles. Clinic orange juice, sandwiches and cakes with sprinkles. A piano, singing and Grandma dressed as Old Mother Riley, carrying a bouquet of vegetables wrapped around with cabbage leaves. It was over.

V for victory.

Noreen L Hall

Rogerson's Jetty Spanish Battery

The Tynemouth Sailing club was founded during the late 1880s. Their boat house being a wooden shed at the north side of the Haven, more or less on the same site as the present-day club house. The club boats at that time were mostly centre board canoes, yawl rigged, balanced lug sails. One member, worthy of mention at that time, was a Mr Kipling — a canoeist of somewhat international fame. He had two boats, the *Spruce* and the *Slipper*, both of which had sliding seats to enable to crew to sit outboard and keep the craft on her feet. Kipling, at that early date, would compete with his boats in races as far afield as the USA.

The membership at that time included Mr McConnell of 'Olde House' Tynemouth and his brother. The latter unfortunately drowned along with a man called Bell when their canoe, in running back to Blyth in a stiff South Easterly wind, turned over in Blyth Bay. The club at that time did not have a very long lease of life, and during a heavy winter's gale, the high tide broke into the boathouse and wrecked most of the boasts that were housed inside.

Not long afterwards, the RNLI lifeboat house on the south side of the Haven became vacant. The TSC was reformed and became tenants to the RNLI for the lifeboat house. At that time a Mr Hurst was commodore and the fleet consisted of a mixed lot of boats ranging from Cutters, long legged and down to smaller centre board boats. Around 1910/12, Capt (later Major) Burton became commodore with HB Nisbet as Vice C. Featonby and Spencer being Secretary & Treasurer.

The old *Zulu* was at that time owned by Guy Clepham and his brother, junior members, and they several times sailed this little boat as far north as Perth. On more than one occasion, the club suffered the loss of a number of the larger boats some September gales. Capt. Burton's *White Heather* breaking adrift from her moorings and dragged right through Rogerson's Jetty; on the south side (Battery Point), The damage causing the final demolition of the construction.

The 1914/18 War put a stop to all sailing from the Haven. After the War, a new committee was formed. The flag officers being the same, viz: Major Burton – Commodore, with H.B. Nisbet – Vice, Harry L Heslop (Son of R. Oliver Heslop, the Newcastle historian) Hon. Secretary. James Linkleter, Treasurer. Committee, J. Lishman, and Mark Potter (of 'Potters Rock' fame).

It was at this time that the club became owners of the lifeboat house. Purchased at a very low figure from the RNLI, through the good offices of Major Burton, at that time local secretary for the RNLI.

It is also interesting to note that the club rules were formulated prior to the First World War, and with two alterations and additions, are practically the same as you can see it today. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Major Burton retired and H.B. Nisbet became commodore, with W.A. Linkleter Vice for a short while, followed by Mr Ridley Copeland and Mr Frank Mallett. Thanks to the efforts of Mr Cecil Gre, who took charge of all the club documents during the Second World War.

The records were kept, and at his instigation a meeting was held as soon as it was possible to return to the Haven, when Flag Officers and a Committee were elected. J. Linkleter – Commodore, I. Slater – Vice. It was at this meeting that it was first proposed to try to obtain permission from the commissioners to erect a club house on the north side of

the Haven, and through the assistance of Mr Jack Liddell, a new member at the time, some old army huts were purchased at Cragside, Rothbury and Netherwitton, which formed the start of the present club premises.

Ian Slater took over Commodoreship, followed by Jack Liddell, then Kenneth Stanger, and then Robin Steavenson. It was just after the start of building the present clubhouse that the present Commodore, Robin Steavenson joined, and introduced to us class dinghy sailing, Resulting in the North East coast eliminating trials for the Olympic Games (Fireflies) being held in the Tyne Estuary under the auspices of the T.S.C. Recently, BBC2 aired a programme "Victorian Times in Colour". There was footage of the Jetty constructed of shiny steel. The main theme of the footage showed the gentry bathing in the haven in their smalls and top hats, while the ladies in their finery sat on the lower part of the pier looking on.

NOTE: The main purpose of the jetty was to unload ships of large granite stones. These were used in the construction of the north pier. These stones were stored on what is now the Spanish Battery car park. Timber piles are still visible today just off the pier. The current pier starts at the base of an ancient sand dune which Tynemouth Priory is constructed. Also to the north of the pier is a dike where molten magma almost broke through. This dike curves all the way to the Isle of Mull.

Along the wall of the pier, a tiny doll embedded into the cement between the stones, constructed from sea shells. The story goes that one of the workmen's young daughter was dying and he was unable to see her. So, he sought permission to place the dolly as a reminder of his daughter. The dolly still exists today, but you have to know where to look.

Colin Ferries

Young Man Descending

I am pulled back to a moment in 1914 as Hugh descends the staircase, making his way slowly down, lengthening the minutes. Barely into his twenties, his photo shows dark eyes off camera, unable to meet my eye. Trying for a smile.

I see him caught on the stairs, hesitant, holding the moment. Foot on the treads. Slow footfall.

His lawyer's fingers on the smooth grain, sliding down. His awkward hat firm. Buttons straight, body warm. Not wanting to say farewell.

Oh, Susannah, wie ist das Leben noch so schön.

Oh, Susannah wie is das Leben schön.

Susannah, eldest sister, breathes heavily, trying to keep you in her eyes — in her sight. Trying to remember each contour of your face.

'I miss you now.

I miss you dear.

I miss you now when you are here.

Oh Susannah...'

And how beautiful was life? The embers still warm in the grate. The sun slanting through the day, pulling round. Soft scent of soap in the bowl. His chest in uniform wrapped tight — heart beating to the warm rhythm of the morning house.

The house that gives up its youngest son.

Fingers lingering on the stairs. 'I will be back mother, I will be back.' His hands losing their grip on the stairs.

'Oh son,' (sharp intake of breath), 'you look so smart. I cannot say the words I fear. I will not let you go,' holding him tight.

Arms empty, losing grip. 'Do not worry, mother, I will be back.'

In the bedroom neat abandoned his work clothes hanging for his return. Susannah runs her fingers over the blankets, still warm. Room full of absence. Wholly gone.

Nearly at the hall, still holding the moment — the quiet beat of the moment.

I don't think I should go.

His feet moving forward unwilling. *I am not going*. Feet pushing forward going on, moving towards the door. A crack in his chest... near his heart.

'I will be back, mother. I will. I will.'

The door clipped shut. The ache for home. The day shivering. The moment gone. Farewells said.

Susannah, empty in the stillness.

The field in France at the end of November the earth cold. Winter biting in. Heart beating to a different rhythm... the rhythm of the cold field. The sinking rhythm of the cold earth. The crack echoes again.

I feel his fingers moving slowly on the staircase. Fingers gliding. Sure.

'How beautiful is life, Susannah?
I told you I would come home.'
His fingers slipping over the banister,
floating by the bedroom door.
'I told you. I told you,
I told you I would come home.'
Warm presence hovering.
Breathing comfort in the homely air.
'Back,' exhaling deeply, 'back where I belong.'

Caroline Kemp: Hugh lived in my house and died aged 23 in a field in France.

Independent Women

My first home in Newcastle was in Fairless Street, Byker. I was born in 1954 into a flat that was our family home until I was twelve years old. The house was tiny, with one bedroom, living room, and scullery. I had two siblings, both brothers. My eldest brother, Ken, was born when I was about five years old, followed by David, five years later. It wasn't easy and understandably stressful for my parents who tried hard to ensure we all had a bed and space.

In the back yard, we had a steel bath that was hung up on the wall. Bath day was a Friday. We would fill up the bath then patiently wait our turn, hoping that the water wasn't cold by the time it came to our wash and wishing perhaps a little more that the water wasn't too manky! Baths certainly weren't a luxury when you were last in the queue and had to clean yourself in dirty water.

We had a pull-down bed and my youngest brother used to sleep in a cot in the living room. We had a black range in the house where my mother made the fire up each day. She would cook in the oven and on cold mornings, she would put our clothes out to warm by the fire or oven. In those days we didn't have central heating but it was always lovely to get into the toasty clothes as Mam looked on, a smile on her face. With what we had, we made a lovely family and we were never short of love.

Dad worked on the railways and my mother was a housewife when we were younger then worked part-time, including at Greggs the bakery. Poverty was almost normal in those days. People did without a lot of things and made do with so many others. We were the original recyclers – nothing got wasted and everything had a purpose. We had to. It was survival and life was hard for a large amount of people. Our flat was part of the slum houses in the area, that were demolished many years ago.

A deprived community but we never felt deprived and I had a positive childhood with fond memories of playing in the back lane where we lived. It was our little community within a community, a daily adventure. Our small back yard would be jam-packed with items and children! There was an outside toilet, a coal shed, a rabbit hutch, and an air raid shelter. Yet it was the place to be and our back yard became like the local youth club, us all piling in and the air filled with laughter, playing and being kids!

Our childhood had a beauty that involved us being able to make our own fun. We weren't bored kids because we used our imagination and created games, adventure, and laughs ourselves. In the summer holidays, Mam would give us a bottle of water and a bag of jam sandwiches. We would head off as a group of kids to Byker Park and spend the whole day there. We would make dens in the vicarage, run around, and play hide and seek. We would climb the rocks, pretending they were mountains and move around the park using our minds to entertain ourselves. A firm favourite was picking a flower and licking the petals before placing them on our nails as nail varnish! We would spend hours doing this and loved it. Another activity involved us standing by the bowling green, picking at the privet and lattice

working it through the fences. The parkkeeper would look out for us, checking we weren't misbehaving too much. Great memories in a time when kids could be kids – carefree and with a focus on friendship and fun.

Washing day in the street was the same day for everyone and my mam was the first person to get a Hotpoint washing machine. In those days, you were judged on the cleanliness of your washing, especially your net curtains and keeping your doorstep clean. All the parents in the street knew one another. There was a strong community feeling, a sense of solidarity and if anyone needed something, they only had to knock on their neighbour's door. No one had anything, but they always had something to share, even if it was just words of comfort. Kindness like that cost nothing and kept the heartbeat of our street going. Families during that time lived nearby to one another, often in the same street or next door to one another. Childcare was taken care of and I used to go to my grandma's for tea after school before my aunt brought me back home. The community was small, with everything we needed in a close parameter including the shops, doctors, and school. Everyone and everything was familiar. Great for support but not so great if you got into trouble!

All of the women in my family were independent to a degree. Many of them worked; my aunt worked in Parsons and my grandma worked at the General Hospital. Mam's parents had passed but they used to own properties and had a corner shop, so my late grandma had worked. Mam worked part-time so a work ethic was drummed into me. The women in my family had a sense of their place in the world and were positive role models. I knew I wanted to be like the women in my life and those before me. I wanted to be an independent woman.

My aunt and work friends from the ropery, Wallsend

I was seventeen when I met my husband, Mick and we moved to Wallsend to our £5 a week rented flat, when I was nineteen years old, after getting married. During my career, I had several jobs and a strong work ethic was instilled in me by my family. In the very early 1970s we had the experience of full employment in that you could finish a job on the Friday, attend the Job Centre the following Monday and be interviewed and start in a new company the next week. It was quick and there was a choice. One place I worked was Peacocks Medical Supplies then in around 1985 computers arrived! I worked in Wallsend in a place called Metano. My role was in the office getting involved with the new phenomena of technology.

When I moved to North Shields, I worked all my jobs on Howard Street, a walkable distance. My career finished in 2020 in a local accountancy company. For the last fourteen years, I was working in payroll mainly. When I was sixty-three years old, I became worried about keeping up at work so I left the firm and found another job with a local business for a few days a week, before retiring in 2020. The pandemic then hit and I agreed to help with some elements as the company was in the care sector. I have continued to help out now and then if needed as they are a great organisation.

Since retiring, I'm very active. I go to the YMCA gym in North Shields and I enjoy writing and going to a writing group. I paint and find both art and writing therapeutic. Mick and I have travelled and continue to, we have visited amazing countries and cities such as New York and Paris. We have been very lucky. I adore my retirement after working for fifty-one years and I try and make the most of each day.

Pauline S

Pauline's full story and those of local women are available in the anthology: In the Footsteps of Walker Women. Available in bookshops, online, and at www.writeonthetyne.com

Pitch & Toss

Old men with big ears,
and cloth caps, gather round.
Pitch & toss for money.
Lookout in place.
The chat, the club,
no women, no children allowed.
Everybody in their proper place,
including the police.
Dark street, corner shops,
little lights twinkling.
Old women with weighing machines, sweet and sugar,
making a bob or two.
Kids playing rounders on a summer night.
Knocky-nine door,
hiding round corners — giggling.
Mothers calling kids in.
The women gathering in the back lane,
warm barmy nights, open back doors.
Sitting in their makeshift chairs,
a problem shared.
Just make sure your net curtains are clean.

Pauline Sheldon

Wallsend Memories

One of my earliest memories of growing up in Howdon, Wallsend, was going to High Street East with my mother and sister on a Saturday morning and calling in at the joke shop, which was on the next corner to the Town Hall. Then we would go on to the pet shop to look at the budgies, mice, and other animals. After that, we would stop off at the little market that was on the site where the new Coronation Club is now.

After shopping, we would go to the Ritz cinema, where we watched cartoons and a film. My sister and me were in the Saturday morning kid's club where badges were bought and worn with pride! We would sing the closing song, which I can't remember now, and loved our mornings there.

One of my favourite treats was going to Marchi's at the top of the High Street. It was a small café owned by an Italian couple, where my absolute favourite drink was served — a glass of fizzy orange with a scoop of ice-cream on the top.

When my sister was about ten years old, and I was about eight, my dad started taking us to the Coronation Club Christmas outings. Here, we would go to various theatres by bus, which was especially exciting as at the destination, we would receive a gift — usually a selection box or tin of Quality Street chocolates. We went on the trips for quite a few years and enjoyed them.

When I was fifteen years old, I started work at a solicitor's office called Jack Goldberg's. This was situated on the High Street, just off Park Road. I was an office junior and loved my job, as Mr Goldberg was a really nice gentleman. When he retired, another solicitor took over: Kidd and Spoor. I remained there for a further three years.

Wallsend has always been a special place to live and I would never want to move anywhere else.

Sheila A

Bonfire Night

Bonfire Night,
excitement in the air.
Days, weeks, months,
guarding the wood.
Lord of the Flies,
in the dark back lanes.
Patrolling the walls,
watching and waiting.
Night- time.
Bonfire Night.
Sparks flying.
Flames shooting.
Everyone, in our back lane,
sitting together.
Snatched kisses behind the old wardrobes.
We throw potatoes into the fire.
Burnt black, cut open,
butter dribbling.
Then eat the skins,
the heavenly smell.
Fire dies down,
old chairs, old wardrobes, gone.
The bric -a -brac of life, gone.
They turn and leave,
on their way home, satisfied.
'Ta-ra.'
Until next year and we all start again.

Pauline Sheldon

How to Say Goodbye

She is sailing very slowly down the Tyne.
But ashore, the men are singing their goodbye with 'Auld Lang Syne'.
Her shadow scales the fathoms as she tolls her final bell,
and the world looks on in silence as *Ark Royal's* last farewell.
So many memories are kept inside her hold,
how can they scrap a treasure worth her weight in gold?
Which naval man could measure all his esteem and his pride,
when he sees the great *Ark Royal* leave forever on the tide.
Salute her final passage and lift the banners high,
the stories of her courage will never, ever die.
Majestic, strong, and steadfast, as she drops her anchor chain.
And the like of the *Ark Royal* we will never see again.
God bless all whom knew her and her great protective arm.
No ship was ever truer as she kept her crews from harm.
And although hearts are breaking as the flags wave on the shore,
the pride she is taking will be hers forever more.

Dorothy M Rawnsley

Photo credit: southtynesidehistory.co.uk

Last Memories

I can remember when I was a child,

That life as a Geordie was frequently wild.

Money was scarce, but with each ship and boat,

the work at Swan Hunter kept Tyneside afloat.

Sounds from the dockyard of hammer on steel,

would echo for miles when they laid a new keel.

And smoke, sweat, and grime on each worker's face,

as time after time, every day quickened pace.

But now that I am older and years have flown past,

for common sense told us that nothing would last.

Gone is the workforce and with them, their skill,

and all of Swan Hunter's is silent and still.

I can remember when I was a lad,

that life here on Tyneside was really not bad.

And looking back now, as I often will do,

my memories strong keep returning anew.

And was I not lucky to see what I saw?

The spirit of Tyneside through Swan Hunter's door.

Photo credit: unknown

Dorothy M Rawnsley

In Days Gone By

In days gone by when we were young,
life seemed so uncomplicated and so much fun.
No mobile phones, no telephones, no television, no internet.
Yet laughter came from children at the drop of a hat.
Horse and cart rides down the back lane,
and skipping ropes always available to entertain.
Matinee film shows to enhance education,
and scooter and bike rides to help keep you fit and have fun.
After World War Two we were happy to stand in a queue,
with our ration books for sweets.
And when shared with your family,
they became such a treat.
The current world seems full of war,
adults and children suffering more and more.
One would hope that in the future children in such wars can regain their laughter,
and everyone will find happiness, peace, and joy thereafter.

Mary Gaddes (aged 87) — a widow for 25 years and an ex-scooter rider, bike rider, dancer, and until recently, a bowler.

North Tyneside

My best friend in spirit led me here,
her cars double outside the place.
Definitely a sign.
As if she'd said, ‘This is it!’
Exciting new home after doing time,
from isolation to total roaming freedom.
Loving the dawn chorus from my back hedge,
the nearby woodland and the lake.
Swans brought me here too — watching the cygnets grow.
Discovering new wild places — so very many birds.

Jules Richardson

The Town Hall, Wallsend

Walking through the door into Wallsend Town Hall, nerves played tunes up and down my spine. A maze of corridors and dusty rooms, with musty smells of paper, old wood, and metal cabinets, brought a sense of déjà vu. Never having been inside the building before, I felt on familiar ground — somehow more comfortable.

My nanna was a cleaner and looked after me in my pre-school years when my mam worked. One of the buildings she cleaned was the council offices in Cleator Moor where I lived, and she took me along to help (and play with the date stamps and old paper). A similar type of building, the same aromas, the same feeling of forgotten Victorian starch and stuffiness. How many people had walked down these corridors? How many people had worked here? Sat at desks, drank tea, chatted, taken important decisions, spent vast amounts of their lifetimes in these robust walls?

Somehow it felt like the sturdy old building was putting its arms around us. We had enrolled in a course to learn how to be foster carers and were about to meet our fellow learners and tutors. After walking along a series of corridors, we eventually found the room. With some trepidation, we opened the door, our eyes taking in the circle of chairs and the people, like us, who had decided to take this journey.

What would it be like? Had we done the right thing? Would we be any good at this? Would we pass the course? How would our son adapt to it? Questions fired around my brain as I looked shyly around the circle at my fellow participants, smiling hellos to them. Were they thinking the same? Would we get on with them? This was a lengthy course and we'd see a lot of each other, work together, form some sort of bond, and hopefully support each other throughout the process and beyond.

The door opened and a friendly-looking lady walked over and introduced herself. My heart beat a little faster as she sat down, smiling at us all. Too late to change our minds now — it was about to start! This was it; the door was slowly opening to a different world. A world where we could help in some small way, to make a difference for children who needed love, security, routine, and a safe place to live, laugh, and quite often cry. We knew it would be difficult. We'd adopted our child and knew some of the process, but this was different. We wouldn't be parents — we'd be carers and we were there to learn the difference. There was a lot to learn; it was a massive responsibility. I swallowed a small marble of nerves as the facilitator introduced herself and looked around the circle at us all. Somehow it felt the right place to be, at the right time with the right people. No looking back. Here we go!

Elaine Gardner

The Ritz

I woke up early on Saturday morning, and I said to my sister,

'I am looking forward to going to the Ritz today.'

So was my mam, it meant she had a couple of hours to herself. Hand in hand, my sister and me walked down to the Ritz. I remember going in and walking down the long foyer with thick carpet that your feet sunk into and a huge chandelier which sparkled like diamonds dancing off the walls and the smell of popcorn, sweets, and hotdogs to my left.

We went to the office box and paid our money, wishing we could go upstairs in the gods, but that cost sixpence and we didn't have enough. We picked our seats and the lights went out. They always showed *Looney Tunes* first before the film. Bugs Bunny ('What's up doc?') and Elmer Fudd, who couldn't pronounce his R's (like 'wabbit'), and of course, Daffy Duck. My favourite was Donald Duck.

At last, the film came on. It was *Superman*. Everyone started to kick their seats, shouting. The usherette came over shining her torch and shouting to everyone to sit in their seats and no standing. At last, the interval came on and we all ran down the side to the lady selling blocks of ice cream from a tray she had hanging from her neck.

As we went back to our seats, they started to show The Dave Clark Five, playing bits and pieces. My sister and myself started to jump around and dancing at the sides of our seats only to get told to sit down or we would be thrown out. What a great day! I couldn't wait till next Saturday!

Karen Marchetto

Welcome to North Shields

Its 1984 — We are moving again. I sit and count the times and places we've moved. Born in Bishop Auckland and moved to Darlington where my brother, Nick was born. Then Sheffield, followed by Scotland, and my sister, Sarah was born. Bradford twice because we at one point took our furniture on holiday for three weeks to Watford (we hated Watford) and now in Cheadle in Staffordshire.

And now, Mam says we are going to some place called North Shields. My best friend, Anita and I look at the atlas during our geography lesson. North Shields is so far away. We sit and work it out, counting the squares on the pages, working out the miles — it's nearly 200 miles! Every time I look at Anita, we cry. We are best friends how are we going to cope? We have a day out in town to mark my departure. Two fourteen-year-olds feeling very grown up in Wimpey's without our mums and dads to order for us.

We arrive in North Shields in the summer of 1984. Our first house is in a small flat in the grounds of the old stately home of Preston Towers — built originally for the Fenwick Family, before becoming a nursing home and now luxury accommodation. I thought we were really posh. We spent the summer getting ready for our new schools. Sarah & Nick would go to King Edwards School, and I was going to the newly renamed John Spence Community High School (previously Preston High School).

I was heading into Year 5 (what is now year 11) and I was taking my 'O' levels the following summer. My first day at John Spence was awful, the school was twice the size of my old school and although with moving about so much I was used to new starts these kids were awful to me! Apparently no one could understand me - it was as if I was speaking a whole different language. But then I suppose with a mix of Scottish, Yorkshire and Cheshire accents all mixed together it may have seemed that way! The worst part was the realisation that my previous school was doing a whole different 'O' level syllabus and all my hard work of the previous year as well as all of the homework over the summer was a waste of time. I was going to need to crush 2 years work into 1 and start all over again. Well this is going to be fun! Welcome to North Shields.

After short stay in Preston Towers, we moved to a house on Hawkeys Lane opposite the *Tynemouth Victoria Jubilee Infirmary*, where my Dad worked as a mental health nurse. The *TVJI* is not there anymore, only the ghosts of previous hospital remains, with a few porta cabins and the GP surgery.

My Mam, also a nurse, would work at *Preston Hospital*, which in its time was the *North Shields Union workhouse*, but this too has been demolished for the newer modern 'North Tyneside District General', and in its place housing that strangely are reminiscent of Preston Hospital. We eventually settled in our forever home in Whitley Bay on the 1st July 1986, by this time I'd taken my 'O' levels at John Spence and was heading to *Whitley Bay College (*part of *North Tyneside College* that's no longer there) to do a Pre-Nursing course, I planned to qualify as a nurse and then join the Army. My brother was now in John Spence. My sister going to Cullercoats Primary.

My favourite part of moving to the northeast and to North Tyneside was how close we were to the beach; we'd never lived this close to the sea always living in the middle of cities

and miles and miles away from the nearest coastline. We spent our weekends in Cullercoats Bay, with a bottle of pop, but usually juice from home and some sandwiches to keep us going. Nick and I, with only three years between us would often cycle from our house in Whitley Bay along the sea front to Tynemouth down the steep bank past the Collingwood Monument and along to the fish Quay, where if we had enough money we would share a bag of chips with salt and vinegar. The cycle back, was much slower, and we usually pushed our bikes back up that bank below the Priory. Sometimes instead of Tynemouth we would cycle to St Mary's Lighthouse, we'd go rock pooling, scaring each other with crabs or trying to find mermaids tears.

As I now look back at all these years and I remember moving to the North East, North Shields has become my home, and a place my children a growing up making their own memories. My youngest tells me she remembers playing out on the street, with chalks, water pistols, paddling pools and learning to ride her bike, as well being in and out of each other's houses on our little cul-de-sac, but when she asks her friends they didn't seem to do this and she thinks they missed out on a whole lot of fun and I have to say I agree.

North Tyneside is my home now. I can't imagine living anywhere else. The sea is my calming friend. I'll often be found at Tynemouth Haven car park, with Knott's Flats behind me, to my right - a view up the river past the Fish Quay, the lifeboat station and the Ferry landings and to my left, the Mouth of the Tyne Piers. No matter the weather thunder, lightening, rain, sun, sunrise or sunset this is my most favourite place to sit and just be.

S.W.

Seagulls

I noticed the seagulls when I came back after living away for thirty years. I don't know where the thirty years went, but I'm back home now. I drive the kids to Tynemouth, where I was brought up. I came past the church and the junction for the metro station, facing down towards the sea. I breathe in and feel the air filling my lungs — proper sea air. Not the air around Stansted Airport, that has been causing problems with me and my son all these years. Choking my son, Ryan — a lifetime of inhalers, stopping him from joining in the fun as a child. Always coming last in the race or not competing at all.

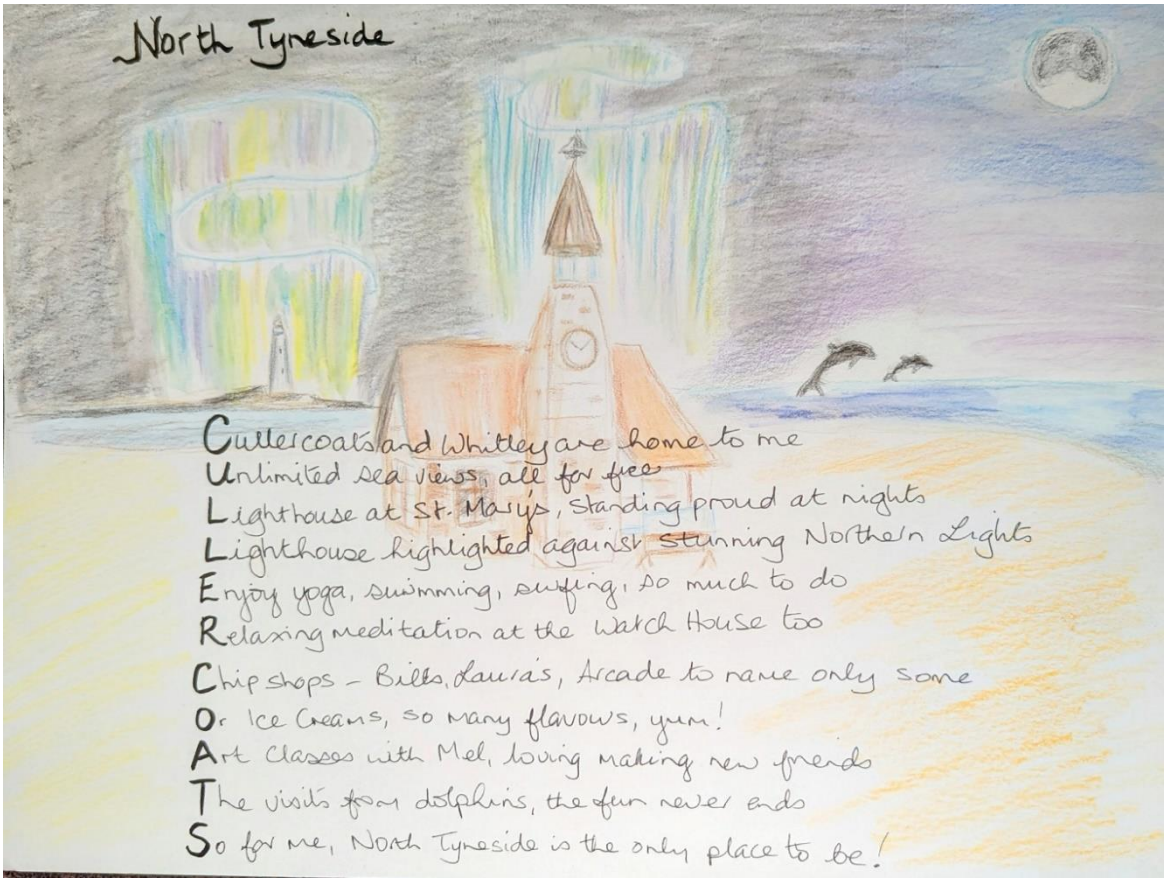
I rush to see, remembering as a child, absorbing the breath-taking view of the long, golden sands of Tynemouth. Childhood memories of the three poodles I walked every night to the beach (Cherry, Mitze, and Penny). It was my beach at night, once all the town's people had come down and bundled back onto the bus to go home. Once it was quiet, you could hear the roar of the sea crashing against the rocks with the seagulls overhead.

One time, I rode my horse, Nibbler, down the beach. He didn't like the soft sand — the wet sand was easier for him. What a joke it was to get him back onto land and we were both exhausted once we got back to Wallsend. I moved to Wallsend in 2010. My cat wouldn't go outside, not liking the sound of the seagulls. When she did eventually go out, she didn't come back! I spent weeks looking for her with no success.

I still love going to the beach, walking along the sand. Proper beaches; Cullercoats, Edward's Bay, and the sailing club. Ryan doesn't like the sand on his feet. At home, I hear the seagulls calling to each other. On summer days, we go to North Shields, have fish and chips in the car overlooking the pier and the seagulls come — waiting to grab a bite! Their feet on the top of the car. Open the car door and they surround you. Along the coast, the other seagulls don't know this trick, feeding as they should!

Christine Cockram

My North Tyneside



Sandy