

Chapter One.

I can vividly recall my first memory, although I can't be sure how old I was at the time.

I can remember having to go to church and it wasn't a Sunday. My mum cried all ~~the way~~ through the service, a large wooden box stood in front of the alter, more people were in our little house than I'd ever seen before, being offered a second piece of cake by my uncle Stan, going to bed late, and not being able to sleep. And when I came down in the morning my mother was still crying and my dad was no longer sitting at the top of the table.

I must have been ~~young~~ ^{young} than six at the time, because my next memory was my first day at school. When my mum picked me up later that afternoon, I told her that I wouldn't see the point of it, as like my dad and uncle Stan I was going to end up working on the docks. But my mum had other ideas, so she would drag me off to St Albans secondary modern early morning, and would ~~be~~ always standing by the school gates when the bell went at four o'clock; to make sure I wasn't playing much.

Mind you, I quickly found a way round that, once the headmaster had finished morning prayers, I would slope off to the docks, and hang around the yard until lunch break. Every day was a new adventure. Ships coming in to ~~set~~ ^{drop} in had their wares from distant lands. Men working on a new cargo ship, that would transport goods to those lands. I wanted to help my uncle Stan build the ship, but he just laughed at me, and said. All in good time my lad.

could also be found

One or two other boys from our school a
in the yard, but I avoided them. They were
older and bigger and used to jump on me, and
push me if ~~I enjoyed them~~ ^{they} ~~were~~ ^{got} ~~there~~ ^{near} ~~with~~. I also had to
keep out of the way of the works manager
^{because} in Mr Hawks, ^{if he ever} found me hanging around
he would grab me by the ear, take me to the
gate, and leave me with the words If I see you
again and I'll report you to the headmaster.
He did see me again, and he did report me to
the headmaster, who ^{by his permission} ~~told me~~ ^{to tell me}
back to class, but my ^{form} master Mr Halliwine never
complained when ~~I happened~~ ^{ever} ~~happened~~ again. I think he
was glad to see the back of me. ~~especially~~ ^{especially} my
mother ~~had~~ ^{sold} out, and stopped my pocket money,
a penny a week, but despite the unusual punishment,
the regularly ^{unusually} running and the loss of my pocket
money I still wouldn't resist spending my morning
on the dials.

I only made one friend, Old Turk Tur, who
lived in the back yard, ~~who~~ Uncle Stan despised
~~him~~ as a dirty ^{old} hamp. He was certainly dirty,
but he always gave me a toothless smile,
whenever he saw me sneaking around the dials,
but kept my distance just in case ~~he~~ ^{he} also
wanted to thump me.

After lunch with Uncle Stan, the remains
of an apple core, half a sandwich, and my
first ~~or~~ taste of beer I would return to school
in time for football. The one activity at St
Alfred that I enjoyed

If Mr Halliwine kept his mouth shut,
and the headmaster didn't find out, I could
go days without being caught, and as long as

I was standing by the gate at four o'clock, which seemed to spite my ~~mum~~, ^{Dad}

On Saturday my Uncle Stan would take me to watch Bristol Rovers play football, a team I intended to join just as soon as I left school, but I couldn't decide what I wanted most, to captain Bristol Rovers, or build a ship.

On Sunday, mum used to drag me off to St Christopher's for the morning service, something I couldn't find a way of getting out of. One Father O'Rourke had given the final blessing, I would run all the way to another recreation ground and join my mates for ~~a~~ game of football.

By the age of seven it became clear that I wasn't even going to get into the school team, let alone captain Bristol Rovers, but at the age of eight I do believe that God had bestowed on me one small ~~talent~~, and it was in my feet.

To begin with I didn't notice, then ~~people~~ ^{the people} who sat in the pews around me, stopped singing, whenever I opened my mouth, but I still had no idea why, until my mother suggested that I should join the ~~school~~ choir. I laughed scornfully, after all, the choir was for girls and women, not for someone who still had dreams of captaining Bristol Rovers, and building a ship that would sail to the far corners of the ~~globe~~. I wouldn't have given the idea a second thought if my father hadn't told me that if you join the choir you'll get a penny for funerals and trumpery for weddings.

And even when I finally agreed to ~~go~~ ^{join} myself to be tested, the Devil ~~sat~~ ^{sat} on obtrude in my path, which took the form of

which took the form of Miss Henn & Monday.

Miss Monday and I would never have come across each other in normal circumstances had she not been the choir master of St Christopher's, but although she was only here for three, and ~~had~~ looked frail enough for a gust of wind to blow her away, it didn't stop her running the choir like a ~~drill~~ general. I have a feeling that even the devil would have been frightened of Miss Monday and certainly Father O'Rourke ~~never~~ questioned her authority.

When I finally submitted to my mind whether ~~not~~ not before she given me three pence (and took a vocal test) Miss Monday left me in no doubt, what would be expected of me if I hoped to leave the congregation and take my place in the front row of the choir stall.

You will always be on time for choir practice, she announced fixing a gimlet eye on me. I started definitely back at her. You will never speak, unless spoken to. I pursed my lips but remained silent. And during the service you will concentrate at all times. I ~~managed~~ and, and then she gave me a way out. You will also be expected to pass a reading and singing test, so that I can be sure that you are able to follow a new anthem or master an unfamiliar psalm, I smiled, pleased to have fallen at the first hurdle. Miss Monday didn't give in quite that easily,

what piece have you chosen to sing for ~~the~~ child? She asked passing me a hymn book.

I haven't chosen any hymn I told her she opened the hymn book, handed it across to me, and sat down at the piano. I smiled at the

thought that I would still be in time for football. She began to play a familiar tune, and when I saw my mother straining at me from the front row I decided to join in. All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful...

A smile appeared on Miss Monday face (my before I reached the last girl made him all, what's your name child she demanded.

Harry Cuthin I told her.

Harry Cuthin you will report for choir practice on Monday & Wednesday and Friday, at six o'clock sharp, and ~~standing~~ turning to the next boy standing ~~beside~~ me said Next,

I promised my mum that I would be on time for my first choir practice, even though I knew that it was going to be my last, and it would have been if I didn't quickly discovered that I was in a different class to any other child in that choir, and the likes of admiring eyes awe that ~~boy~~ I had caught on the football field, were ~~at all~~ being bestowed upon me. Miss Monday pretended not to notice.

When I hurried up for school on Monday Mr. Walpole ~~came~~ side and surprise ~~to find~~ sitting in the front row, and was even more surprised when I revealed a sudden interest in my chosen subject.

He began by teaching me the alphabet, and within days I could write out all 26 letters, although not always in the correct order.

My mum would have helped me when I came home in the afternoon, but she couldn't read or write.

My Uncle Tom could just about squiggle an signature, and although he could tell the difference between worthiness and Pawning blood, I was never surprised that he had misread some words, but ~~forgetting~~ the different ~~sounds~~ on the cigarette paper.

But this didn't stop me sitting on the floor in my room writing out the alphabet on on any piece of spare paper I could find. Once I'd mastered the alphabet Mr Hollwime moved on to a few simple words, dog, cat, mum, and dad. I couldn't remember my dad. This was followed by my first four letter word DOG and then five ~~four~~ and six school. By the end of the month I could write my first sentence. The ~~one~~ quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog, which Mr Hollwime pointed out contained every letter in the alphabet. But perhaps more important, by the end of my second month I could spell the word psalm, hymn, and even anthem. However I began to feel that time was against me, if I still hoped to pass Miss Monday's ~~tests~~ tasks.

I was half an hour early for ~~this~~ ~~the~~ ~~next~~ the ~~now~~ choir practice, and sat silently in the stalls, not uttering a word, hoping that she would pick on someone else. Miss Monday stared at her ring would be applicable, and left us all in no doubt and left us in no doubt what would be expected of us if we did not wish to rejoin our parents in the congregation.

The first test came immediately. We were all asked to recite the Lord's prayer. This was not a problem for me, because for as long as I could remember my mum would fall on her knees each night and repeat the familiar

words before tucking me up in bed, and going off to work.

However, Miss Monday's second test was to prove far more demanding. By the end of your second month, you were expected to read a psalm out loud in front of the rest of the choir. I chose Psalm 121 which I also knew off by heart, having sung it so often in the parish. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. I could only hope that my help cometh from the Lord, and although I was now able to turn to the correct page in the Psalm book, I feared that Miss Monday would quickly discover that I was unable to follow the verse line by line. If she did, she didn't let on, because I remained in the choir stalls, while two other miscreants (her word) were dispatched back to the congregation.

Miss Monday's final test came four weeks later, and was by far the most demanding. The last half dozen of us were asked to recite out the Ten Commandments in the correct order, without referring to the book of Exodus.

Miss Monday turned a blind eye to the fact that I placed theft ahead of murder, and wouldn't spell the word adultery, and certainly ~~didn't know~~ didn't know what it meant. But it was only after the other miscreants were summarily dismissed that I was made aware just how good my voice must be.

By the end of the third month, ~~she~~ Miss Monday had selected four new trebles to join the choir, or little anyway as Father O'Rourke was won't to ~~decide~~: the remainder having been dispatched for ~~singing~~ committing such unforgivable sins as chittering, chewing gum,

and in one case, the removal of two lads who were caught playing cards during the Nun's Dimiss.

The following Sunday I was for the first time allowed to adorn myself in a long blue robe, and white stockings with ruffled turn. I alone wore a broze medallion of the Virgin mother around my neck, to show that I had been selected as a noble soul. I would have proudly worn ~~#~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{the} medal the way home like a cup winner's medal, if Mrs Monday had not removed it at the end of every service.

Sunday, became the happiest day of my week, when I was transported into another world, although ~~I knew that~~ ^{the} this state of ~~delight~~ ^{joy} would not last for ever, what I didn't know was that Mrs Monday and my mom were already planning, the next step in my musical career,

for me to sing on TV and

CHAPTER TWO

Whenever Stan rose ^{in the morning} he woke the whole house. No one ever complained as he was the bread winner ^{in the family} and in any case, he was cheaper and more reliable than an alarm clock.

(PFO)

The bedroom door would slam, before you heard him marching ~~along~~ the corridor, down the stairs, and out of the house, before he disappeared into the ~~outhouse~~ privy. If anyone was still asleep, the pulling of the chair, the rush of water, followed by two more slammed doors before returning to his bedroom, served to remind the rest of the household that ~~Stan~~ expected his breakfast to be on the table by the time he reached the kitchen.

Harry's mum would be next up, only moments after the first slammed door, and she would be preparing breakfast by the time Stan returned from the privy. Grandma would be next, and would have joined her daughter in the kitchen, moments before Stan appeared, ~~with only a hand to~~

Harry would only be moments behind, if he hoped to get any breakfast, and the last to appear would be Grandpa, who was so deaf he even ~~occurred~~ slept through Stan's early morning ritual.

This ordered regime never changed in the Clifton Household, because when you've only got one outside privy, one wash basin, and one toilet, order becomes imperative.

By the time Harry had washed his face in a trifle of freezing water, his mother would be serving breakfast in the kitchen.

One ~~#~~ thickly cut slice of bread each, two thicker ones for Stan, would be toasted if there was enough money over for coal that week. A bowl of porridge would be placed in front of Stan, and

but not until Harry was allowed to lick the plate, ~~the~~ ^{as} his Uncle had pushed it aside.

A large iron kettle was always on the ~~stove~~, which Gran poured into a variety of unmatching mugs, using ~~a recently acquired tea strainer~~. ^(pro) While the rest of the family enjoyed a cup of tea, Stan would open his favorite bottle of ~~beer~~, which he would gulp down in one draft, ^{beer}

Stan would then rise from the table, ~~and~~ ^{hurriedly} before picking up his lunch box, which Gran had been preparing before she and her breakfast. Two spam sandwiches, a swage, an apple, and two more bottles of beer. Once ~~had~~ left the room, to go to work, everyone began to talk at once,

Gran always wanted to know who had visited the ~~restaurant~~ where Harry worked, ~~the~~ details of meals that were cooked on an Aga, and a room lit by electric light bulbs that didn't leave any smell, not to mention customers who sometimes left a ~~scrapping~~ piece of tip, which Harry had to split with the cook.

Harry was more interested in how Harry was getting on at school, and demanded a daily report, which didn't seem to interest Gran, as she'd never been to school, come to think of it, she'd never been to a restaurant.

Grandpa rarely ~~and unwillingly~~, because after four years of loading ^{and unloading} an artillery gun, morning noon and night, he had been left so deaf, that he ~~had~~ ^{had} to satisfy himself with watching the moving-ups, and nothing from time to time. ^(no)

The family routine never varied, except on Saturday and Sunday.