

## *Days of Heaven in Big Hell*

Crisis was the bookmark for my entry on history's pages. I doubt however if Sidney and Gladys Robertson were overly interested in the trouble that was brewing in the Abadan oilfields of Persia on Friday the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1951, when the latest addition to their young family was born at the Queen's Cross Maternity Hospital in Aberdeen. Was there and will there ever be a time when trouble does not stir in that ill-fated region of the world?

Sidney and Gladys were little more than children themselves, already with a two and a half year old daughter, Annie, and struggling to make a life in the harsh, black and white world of the early Fifties. Married as teenagers and yet to have a home of their own, a long struggle lay ahead of them. My father was an unskilled man, struggling to find a decent job after two years of National Service in the Royal Air Force. My mother was just a girl looking for a home to put her stamp on as a wife and mother, as was the norm in those days.

In 1951 the world was still recovering from the ravages of World War Two and had sunk into the Cold War. Prophets of Armageddon were everywhere! Rationing still applied to some goods and there was still a 'bombed hoosie' here and there to explore. The Aberdeen I was born into was a majestic city of grey granite, hewn from its own, world famous, quarry at Rubislaw. Hall Russell's, where my father had worked as a boy as a rivet catcher, and John Lewis and Son were famous shipbuilding yards at the mouth of the River Dee. You could walk the length of Albert Quay to Pointlaw across the decks of countless trawlers; Aberdeen was a major fishing port and a market and export centre for its fertile hinterlands of Buchan and the Mearns.

Several great paper mills operated in and around the city, engineering works like John M Henderson on West North Street, timber yards like Fleming's on Baltic Place, the Torry fish houses, textile mills, a comb works, the city was a hive of industry. A thriving seaport and LNER and LMR running passenger and freight rail services in and out of Joint Station confirmed the city's position as a great trading centre.

The world and Aberdeen were recovering from war and rebuilding for the future. Bruce's and Hall's were two of the city's largest building firms but I bet no-one at the former ever dreamed that quarter of a century later they'd

be responsible for the biggest architectural monstrosity ever to darken the Silver City's skyline, Norco House!

My first re-collection of this world was one of great expectation! I was approaching my third birthday, for which my father had promised me, as my present, a pair of 'Oor Wullie' dungarees. Me a man at last, and he assured me that Mum could never give me into trouble for getting them dirty. It is from that moment that all my memories of life stem.

My world then was an attic flat in an old tenement building at 74 Park Street. The first five months of my life had been spent at my father's mother's house at 66 Virginia Street, deep in the heart of the city's dockland area. At last, the Corporation had allocated mother and father a home of their own and it was there that my world began.

Number 74 stood at the junction of Park Street and Constitution Street just where the tram lines turned down to the Corporation depot in the beach area of the city. A building that could have sprung from the pages of a Dickens novel, it backed on to a smaller, equally dingy tenement that was entered up a flight of stairs off Constitution Street. There were three floors topped by our attic flat and a basement flat too, so eight families dreamt their dreams and held high hopes within its walls. There was no electricity; the lighting was by gas mantles. I never recall entering the front doorway and finding the stairway other than dark but I never recall feeling anything but safe in that place, safe with my mother, father and sister.

Next to the front entrance a flight of stairs led down to a drying green of sorts, where I can recall my mother hanging out her washing. A dilapidated old washhouse and several cellars ran the length of the green but I don't think they were ever used for any purpose. It was certainly not a place where kids could play either. There were no toilets in the building but a small brown wooden door set in the wall, ten yards from the street entrance concealed the one toilet, meant for the use of all the tenants. The door was as often as not kicked in; my mother always blamed drunken Teddy Boys, probably wrongly, heading home after closing time from the nearby Eastern Star, so I'll leave it to the imagination as to how all the families made other 'arrangements' for their personal needs!

My father was a small man, just less than five feet four inches tall. I always remember him as being sun-tanned in those days but the reality was that he was simply weather-beaten from long hard hours of manual labour, performed outdoors in all climates. His pride and joy was his shock of black hair, usually well plastered down with Brylcreem. It would trouble him greatly when it started to recede at a fair rate of knots in his late twenties! We cuddled often and he was so hard to touch, his body honed by hard work, but his voice and his heart were always soft. To my mother he was a dead-ringer for Dirk Bogarde in 'The Spanish Gardener.' As the years passed and my father and I grew up and grew older together I would always see in him a touch of James Dean's 'Rebel Without A Cause', not in any visual sense but

for that edge that was always about him, that 'me against the world' edge. It had worn into him from a darker, harder time in his life and would never leave him in this world.

My mother was equally small in stature, almost two inches shorter than he was. She also had jet-black hair, which was shoulder length, deep dark eyes and a pale skin, which was highlighted by the bright red lipstick that was the mandatory fashion extra of the day. They each had plain grey Sunday best suits and when the occasion arose could cut a smart picture as a young couple of their time. My sister Annie and I were both growing and changing as kids do and the best description of us then was that we were noisy, messy, curious and mainly to our mother, deaf.

We are all explorers in this life and for children a world can be contained in no more than a few hundred yards. My world in those austere days of the Fifties was just that, small, busy, exciting and always with a new secret to offer any intrepid three year old about to make his first, almost solo, trip to the shops with his 'big,' five year old sister. You could stand at the front door of our tenement and see a Co-op grocer and baker at the top of Constitution Street. A short walk up Park Street would take you past Mrs Fyvie's paper shop and Barrack's the baker which simply oozed delicious smells into the air; you could actually see the baking being done at the back of the shop counter. A few yards on I seem to recall the tiny fishmonger's shop where I would stand spellbound as I watched the water stream down the window-pane, forming magical patterns as it ran. This of course was the cooling system of the day as was the way all the fish on display lay buried in deep trays of ice. A few more steps took you past the British Fish and Chip Shop, across the top of South Constitution Street, past Gammie's the hairdresser and on to Mr Suttie, the grocer at the corner of Wales Street. My mother did a lot of her shopping there; he was a tall bald-headed man always dressed in a grey jacket and white apron. He often gave you a wee sweet when mum had finished shopping and would smile as he scribbled down the total when she whispered, "Can I pay on Friday?"

On the other side of the street was our favourite chipper, 'The Golden Chipper.' Then you could head for home past Tommy Neri's sweet and ice cream shop on the corner of Frederick Street, the 'Saltoun Arms' pub on the other corner, Wood's the paper shop, Michie's the chemist and post office, then just opposite our front door the old second-hand shop. Just a stone's throw further down the street was Willie Reid's, a sort of repair shop. There you could buy paraffin, blue, pink or green and in a year or two, when I got bigger and stronger, my father would let me carry the accumulator battery for our radio across the road to have it topped up. Mr Willox the grocer was on the corner of Summerfield Terrace and he seemed to be at the outer limits of my world. It amazes me to look at this, now much changed, stretch of street and see that all this was within the length of a few hundred yards. All a family could need, right on their doorstep. Yes, those were the black and

white days of the Fifties when my world was so safe and so small!

In our tenement there was not too much room for exploring. Our attic flat was reached up a final flight of curved stairs. Three doors led off of a small landing, one into a tiny living room with a large coal fire and gas oven on the far wall. A single gas mantle was the only lighting and there was a small skylight type window, which, if my father climbed on a stool, let him look up Park Street towards Justice Street and the Castlegate. The other two doors led to bedrooms, but I don't ever remember us using them; mum and dad slept in the living room, my sister and I in the smallest bedroom and the other big room was just a play area with nothing in it. I think a lack of furniture and the cost of keeping the whole flat warm were the main reasons for that.

It always amazed me that our sink was situated on that final sharp bend in the stairs about four steps down from the landing. My mother, father and sister had all become adept at standing, flamingo like, on one leg, on the stairs to wash their hands and faces. I was too small to reach the sink from the lower steps and in too much danger of falling down the stair if I tried it from the steps above, so my sister would be given the job of standing on the steps below me, helping me to keep my balance, whenever I needed a wash or a drink of water. Being just a wee bit messy or thirsty didn't seem too much of an inconvenience back then.

People other than my mother, father and sister soon became part of my world. A colourful band shared number 74 with us. Beldie and her bairns, who would become our first pals; Nan MacGregor and her two young sons who were both trawlermen. I remember the 'stand off of the stair rods,' when the boys had removed them all for firewood. My mother was adamant that, with two young kids, their social re-cycling would not progress beyond the bottom of our curved flight of steps. Jackie MacGregor was reputedly a bit of a tough guy and I think my father was none too keen on the prospect of a showdown. It never happened; Jackie was no match for my mother in full flight when she tackled him. A few choice words from her and a few muttered apologies from him were as far as it got. To the day we left the building that final curved flight of stairs was the only one with a full set of stair rods. I vaguely recall the old woman in the basement flat who kept about four greyhound dogs that were probably the reason we couldn't play down in the green, but the other neighbours are even greyer figures in my memory.

At three or four years of age any journey away from the cocoon of home is a great adventure and my horizons had the foreign lands of grandmothers to voyage to and explore. My mother's parents lived on Canal Place off Mounthooly in those days. We would visit there in the afternoons mostly, just mum and me. My father would be at work and my sister had left me to go to a strange new place called school. Mounthooly was a huge junction near the heart of the city, full of shops. We could walk there from home, along King Street and then Nelson Street. A rough earth road, which ran alongside the railway line from Kittybrewster to the harbour, led to my grandmother's

house. There was always a train to see on the line, as they ferried all manner of goods to and from the docks.

A steep flight of wooden steps led up to my grandmother's front door, which opened into a small vestibule, which in turn accessed a large square living room. A roaring coal fire always seemed set, but the visiting kids were always keen to go beyond and into the 'L' shaped hall. This was a great place to play. My abiding memories of visits to my grandparents were crowds, card-schools and tea. Twelve children and their offspring meant they always had visitors and when the Thomsons got together they liked to play cards and drink tea. Queenie was the favourite card game and a pot of tea was always brewing on the stove.

My grandmother only had one lap and to me it always seemed that someone else had got there first. Perhaps I was just too shy and too small to be first there and be pampered. 'Spud' and 'Teenie' Thomson's children were Ruby, Molly, Ina, Mina, Phyllis, my mother Gladys, Doris, Billy, Stanley, Sydney, George and Albert. They had actually had fifteen children but three, Charlotte, Christina and Douglas, had sadly died during childhood. What an amazing couple, what a colourful family!

Nicknames were soon given to all that entered this busy social scene and I quickly came to be known as Noddy. My grandmother had a clock with a little Noddy figure that rocked to and fro with each passing second. My neck often ached from the effort of trying to follow his every move. Well into my teens most of mum's side of the family only ever called me by this name.

On one occasion we all visited on a Saturday and on the way, mum and dad had taken us into the local paper shop for some sweets. Whilst inside, I fell in love with a plastic guitar and Annie and I began doing our best impersonation of Bill Haley and the Comets in an attempt to convince them to buy it. Nothing doing. On the way home after tea there was panic—I was missing. They all looked for me everywhere, to no avail. Much to my mother's relief, I was eventually found quite close by leaning against the rear wheel of an old Corporation Bedford truck, strumming away to my heart's content on the plastic guitar. How the guitar or I got there no one knows and I honestly can't remember. Without another word we four headed off in the direction of home. Annie and I loved that guitar!

A faint remembrance of a visit to 66 Virginia Street lingers in my mind, but by now my Grannie Nicholson had moved to Drum's Lane, off the Upperkirkgate, in the city centre. Almost at the St Paul's Street end of the lane, a single flight of stairs led up to her tiny flat. We usually visited her of an evening or at the weekend. My dad's elder brother Percy would sometimes be there but more often than not would be away at sea or out with his pals.

She'd had seven children, Cissie, Laura, Gracie, George, Percy, John and my father Sidney. Gracie and Cissie were married and lived in England, whilst John was in the Merchant Navy and was soon to emigrate to Australia. Laura lived across in Sinclair Road in Torry with her husband Kit and

my two cousins Betty and Sandra. Percy was the, mostly loveable, rogue of the family, but he was a great trial to Grannie Nicholson due to his heavy drinking. George's story was heart breaking; when he was only a babe-in-arms all eyes in the house had momentarily left him. In that split second he'd fallen from a table and tragically suffered a fatal injury. She was therefore often alone and Annie and I seemed to be the joy in her life. She cuddled us, sang to us, always had a penny for a sweet, and gave us that most precious gift that can be given to any child, time.

I had a nickname in her house too; she always called me 'Flower-pot,' and needless to say I was glad that only she, Mum, Dad, and Annie ever made any use of it. We seemed to listen to a lot of radio when we were there: Jimmy Clitheroe, Arthur Askey, Uncle Max, Family Favourites, Ted Ray, Vera Lynn, Jimmy Edwards and The Goons are some of the star names I recall from those times. I'm sure 'Gunsmoke' was the show my father always had to listen to whenever it was on.

Only one other trip stays with me from those days. Annie and I were scrubbed and dressed up one Sunday and Mum and Dad took us on a tram up Union Street and then another along George Street. We were to be taken to my father's grannie's house in Ann Street. As we walked from the tram stop to the house we were told to be very quiet and very still whilst we were in the house. We both were, and I can remember nothing other than a little old lady dressed in black. Later we were told she was ninety years old and, looking back now, she could have been Queen Victoria—and would indeed have well remembered that great Queen's reign.

There are great days in all our lives and my first lives with me as clearly now as it did that August morning in 1956. Only the mix of panic and excitement has dimmed but going to primary school for the very first time was a great day.

My mother, dressed in her Sunday best grey suit, walked me along Park Street, up Scotty's Brae and down Urquhart Road to the school gate. There was a crescendo of noise from the playground, which stilled instantly at the shrill blast of a whistle. As one all the children ran to form orderly lines and I think I glimpsed Annie smiling back at me as they all marched inside.

As I stood there with my mother, I was suddenly aware of a terrible screaming noise. A lady in a green suit was dragging a small redheaded boy, desperately clinging to any handhold he could find, towards the school gate.

"No, no, no," he screamed, "I don't want to go to school."

"Perhaps this isn't such a good idea after all," I thought, but suddenly my mother and I were through the blue front door of that imposing, castle-like granite building and in Miss McKinnon's office. A small grey-haired lady, she had a brief chat with my mum, then asked me some things and simply said, "Yes, Sidney will do for Mrs Allan's class."

As she showed my mother out and ushered me to the door of Mrs Allan's room I saw the lady in the green suit struggling to hold the still screaming redheaded boy on a chair in the corridor. Miss McKinnon knocked on the door and I slipped across the frontier of a new land. A sea of small faces seated in orderly rows of double desks eyed me curiously, all boys and girls I didn't know. The kindly face of Mrs Allan smiled at me and offered me a seat next to one of the boys. I sat down without hesitation and instantly became a member of the class.

A few minutes later, the still screaming redheaded boy was dragged, one leg and one arm at a time, into the classroom. He put up a wonderful fight and it took the lady in the green suit, Miss McKinnon and Mrs Allan together to get him through the door. The lady in the green suit somehow didn't seem to want to leave him now, but was eventually persuaded that he'd be alright and she could go. She left in tears and he stayed—still screaming.

That boy turned out to be Malcolm Watson. I still see him now and then to this day. We talk and laugh about those times but what would today's 'PC' brigade think of the fact that he then spent most of his first week at school standing in a corner facing the wall? One morning he came and sat down at the desk just in front of me. He too had crossed the border and entered that enchanted land of knowledge and learning.

I would spend the next two years in Mrs Allan's class. Boys like Bobby Burns, Robbie Clunas, Jim Davies, Jim Soutar, Graeme Yule and Davie Calder would become, in an ever turning circle, firstly best friend, worst enemy and then friend once more. Those strange creatures, girls; girls like Dorothy Norrie, Rosemary Allen, Sandra Rose and Linda Mutch, would also become friends, and in those childlike secret moments would also become a first love.

As I look back now I can see that, for me, it took seven years for the world to come up with a description of how starting primary school felt. From that first eventful morning, every day was like walking into Dr Who's Tardis for the very first time. There was always something new to discover and any piece of knowledge once understood is as great a thrill as a journey to the farthest part of the cosmos could possibly be.

To a five-year-old King Street Primary School was a gigantic place, a huge granite building surrounded on all sides by playgrounds. We could enter up two flights of stairs from Bodie Place, where we all became regular customers at the small sweet shop on the corner or go through the main entrance off King Street. For the brave and bold there was another way in but this meant running the gauntlet of passing the janitor's house; a green metal gate off Jackson Terrace led past Mr Garrow's house but he never did take kindly to any of the kids using that route.

The playgrounds were teeming with school life as kids ran, jumped, skipped and learned those 'other' school rules of what to do and when. 'Film

Stars,' 'King Ba,' 'Sappy Sojers,' 'Tick and Tack' and 'Kick the Cannie' were some of the first games I recall. The girls would always be playing with ropes and balls and their games always seemed to involve an accompanying song. They played one game called 'Beddies,' which involved chalking squares on the ground and kicking an empty polish tin or similar shaped piece of wood around them. I always felt that boys would be better at this game than girls, and away from the mocking eye of school pals, I took every opportunity to prove this to my sister Annie when we played together.

Inside the school was a maze of huge corridors; every wall was beige in colour and every piece of woodwork, every coat peg, every bench and every door was painted pale blue. Mrs Allan was a teacher and a mother figure and combined those roles so well I was always happy to be in her class and often daydreamed, that just like my mother, she would cuddle me and stroke my hair. From the moment we were given our first reading book about Mr and Mrs Brown and their two children, who I think were called Tom and Mary, there was no stopping us. We were like sponges as we soaked up all the knowledge that Mrs Allan could pass to us. The mysteries of reading, counting and spelling unravelled for us on a daily basis and we were always ready to absorb more. A short break to drink our perfectly shaped one third of a pint bottle of milk in the morning and we were off once more.

I remember so well us all singing in class and our delivery was in that age-old style of five and six year olds, the whole song sang on a single note. 'Jesus Loves Me' was the most often sang but my favourite was the 'Road Safety Song,' and the words stick with me to this day.

"We must have safety on the Queen's highway,  
So stop look left, look right, then look left again.  
Then off we go if the road is clear,  
Safely home to mother 'cause there's nothing to fear.  
Don't be in a hurry going to and from the school,  
Kerb drill for you is the golden rule.  
We must have safety on the Queen's highway,  
So stop look left today!"

Our own efforts at pictures and stories covered the walls and the very best would find themselves proudly displayed for all to see in the corridor outside our room. Drawing was never a strong point of mine and my failings would haunt me four years later when, in primary five, the first ever Parent's Evenings were introduced. Our teacher then was Miss Hadden, a stern woman but a grand teacher. She had decided that for the occasion we would be very topical and draw a queue of people outside the pictures; cinema was still the great mass entertainment media and families flocked to see the latest movies. It had fallen to me to draw the Commissionaire, one of those gentlemen who in those days would dress in uniforms that would make even the most

pompous ‘Banana Republic’ dictator look quite drab. In one of her softer moments Miss Hadden spared my blushes and my parents’ embarrassment in one fell swoop. By neatly changing the legs of my grotesque creation into wheels and the head into a flashing light she successfully, on the night, passed him off to all the visiting mums and dads as an ice cream kiosk!

That would raise a laugh in the future but in March 1957 I scored 65 out of 70 in an unseen test given by Miss McKinnon. I was so proud of that first report card and my mum and dad were so pleased too. Not a bad effort for a five year old! Mrs Irene Allan must have seen another side to me and her comments at the foot of my report card mentioned my mischievous nature and a need to improve my behaviour.

Primary school times were to prove the halcyon days of my educational years and none were better than those two with Mrs Allan. The then Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, would enrage the working classes in the summer of 1957 by telling the country, “You’ve never had it so good.”

Had he at that moment meant those words just for me then, “He’d never have got it so right.”

If school was an adventure then it was no less so at home. From where we lived it was only a few hundred yards down Constitution Street to Aberdeen’s beach area and the golden sands, that to me seemed to stretch from one end of the world to the other. Mum and Dad would take us to play there on a Sunday, and as we got even bolder, Annie and I would sneak off to the swings there as often as we could—much to my mother’s annoyance, and we both became quickly aware of the high temper she could have.

A family of Sikhs had moved in to a flat just across the road from us and my mother wove them into a scare story that I think was meant to stop us roaming around. It involved the men carrying daggers in their turbans, but it didn’t deter us one little bit. Kids have no misguided preconceptions and we would go out of our way to talk to them; and of course they were happy to talk to and play with us.

At the time Aberdeen styled itself as Scotland’s leading holiday resort and in the summertime during their ‘Fair’ holiday, the air would ring with Glaswegian accents along Constitution Street, where there were several guest houses. As we played and wandered back and forth to the beach we’d banter with them. It was all great fun. The ‘No Vacancies’ signs were always in the windows then.

Even as a child the hurt and fear of the world can’t be shut out forever and it was now that I would meet them for the first time. My mother and father were so happy when they told us that we were soon to have a new brother or sister; Annie and I were so excited. I remember that one day Mum had to be taken to hospital and we went to Grannie Nicolson’s for a night or two. My father came for us on his own, and he seemed to have been crying. He did

cry as he told Grannie, Annie and me that we'd had a little sister, Gladys, who wouldn't be coming home but had gone to heaven instead. My mother had carried Gladys for the whole nine months only for her to be tragically stillborn.

We were told to be extra especially good when Mum came home and we tried our best. She seemed so sad and quiet. We didn't know how to help. If a child as young as I was then can feel grief then I recall that mine was not for the sister I would never know but for myself and the sister I would never have. At night in bed Annie and I would cry together about Gladys and could hear Mum and Dad do the same in the next room.

Time and tide wait for no man and we four too got back to normal things; work, play and just enjoying being a family again. Life was hard enough for my mother and father as they struggled to raise two children on his £7 a week wage, earned by five and a half days labour each week for John Ellis, who ran a market garden business at Cove. My father enjoyed the outdoor work and always spoke well of Mr Ellis, but it was ever a struggle for my mother to make ends meet. Our parents always spared my sister and I any hardship and it was only as we grew older that we saw what an effort they had made and what a good life they had given us.

Gladys had brought grief to my young life. My mum, my dad and Annie had helped me deal with it. Not long after that time I was to feel the first real fear of my life; I know there's a God because he sent an angel to look after me—my sister Annie.

Annie, Isobel Ann Robertson, as dark as I was fair, annoyingly then always several inches taller than me, long-suffering of my mother's favouritism towards me, always there when I needed her and who never ever gave me less than everything.

We were learning that not all was well with my mother's health; she'd a weak heart and was going to have to spend some time in hospital. My father would have to keep working—it was strictly no work, no pay in those days, and my sister and I were going to stay for a while at the Children's Shelter.

We were taken up to see the place on a Sunday by my mum and dad; I was heart-broken, terrified and inconsolable all at the same time. We'd only be there for two weeks at the most; it might as well have been two years to me. I've no bad tales to tell of the people there but no good ones either. I was only five years old and five-year-olds need the understanding of their own mums and dads; they simply need to be let off with things a lot of times.

A few years later I'd encounter a harsher regime at Linn Moor but, being a little older, was just about able to look after myself. Here, I was lost, sad and lonely; but Annie had other ideas. She never left my side, helped me through meal times and even saw me to bed, often with me crying, before going to her own dormitory. Think of all the little, simple, personal things that a five-year-old can't do. Annie did all of those things for me. She was only seven!

Life is a weird box of tricks and we have not remained close in adult life,

but I never think of her without my throat tightening and a tear forming in the corner of my eye.

Mum was soon home, and so were we, and in no time life was wonderful again. There always seemed to be a laugh around the corner, none better than when Dad chased a dosser off of our landing early one morning. That guy must have been nifty because Dad could shift in those days. He was to learn that morning that he was quicker still in reverse as the only clothes he was wearing, his 'Long Johns,' started to fall down as he sprinted past Michie's the Chemist. The dosser made his escape and Dad beat a hasty retreat back to number seventy-four.

My mother loved a cup of 'Camp' coffee in those days. The label on the bottle was a picture of a piper standing at a table on which stood a bottle of 'Camp' coffee. The label on *that* bottle had a picture of a piper standing at a table and so on and so on. I could spend ages looking deep in to that label just to see how many pipers I could count. I was also fascinated by mirrors but could never turn round quickly enough to catch myself turning round, however sneaky I tried to be. I could keep everyone in stitches with my antics in front of a mirror.

My world then from 1951 to late 1958 had known grief, fear, wonder and expectation but most of all my world had known love, laughter and much happiness. The world outside of home, family and school had meant very little to me but it was a world of amazing events.

The great war leader Winston Churchill had returned to power in 1951 but resigned from politics four years later. Dwight D Eisenhower was then American President and Stalin had died. It would be years before the truth of his monstrous reign over Russia became known. The 'Father of the Nuclear Age,' Albert Einstein, had also died, leaving an uncertain world, unsure of the power of the technology at its disposal.

We were presented with the original cause for every couch potato who has ever lived, the TV remote control; and the parking meter made its bow on the streets of Britain.

Movies were still a huge part of people's lives and would soon become so for me. Some classics made their first appearance in those years; *The African Queen*, *High Noon*, *Singing In The Rain*, *Calamity Jane* and *White Christmas* to name but a few. Those marvellous Ealing comedies typified the essence of the age, a country surviving harsh times but a people who could still laugh at them.

Elvis Presley had cut his first demo at Sun Records and soared to stardom. Such was his impact that the name of his first movie was changed from *The Reno Brothers* to *Love Me Tender*, the title song.

At Shawfield in 1955 an Archie Glen spot-kick saw Aberdeen beat Clyde

and become champions of the Scottish Football League for the first time. Magnificent Union Street was still cobbled and on a famous night in 1958 the Corporation burned the last of the trams at the Beach.

Another Middle East crisis, this time over the Suez Canal, had Dad talking of war and Mum feeling very scared. Most amazing of all the Russians launched *Sputnik 1* and the Space Age was well and truly born.

Forty years later I would learn from a neighbour, then in his seventies, that 74 Park Street and the smaller tenement it backed on to had been known as 'Big Hell and Little Hell.' They may well have been slum dwellings but such had been my life there that I will only ever recall that time as, 'Days of Heaven in Big Hell.'

Loving times in loving arms,  
That sheltered me from harm.  
If a sadness came my way,  
I was sure it wouldn't stay.  
Loving days and loving years,  
My world emptied of all fears.  
Done for me a son and brother,  
By father, sister and my mother.