

## Chapter One

***'You don't have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body.'***

*C. S. Lewis*

A secret holds and binds you; it imprisons its victim in a dark cage in solitary confinement. I became the human animal circling my cage, trying to work out how to set myself free. How do I open the door without a handle? How do I break the lock that has no key? Can I escape without outside help? Will I ever be free again? ‘

In the very beginning, I wasn't aware of the secret. War was giving a special intensity to life that had never been experienced before, and perhaps never would be again. In early February, it was snowing. It lay four inches deep on the little road in Withington, a suburb to the south of the city of my birth, Manchester. The blackened buildings of this important inland port and industrial giant were in the grip of war and it would be several decades before they would be blasted of their hundred years of grime. Today, it is a city of cleaner facades, standing upright and proud of its great heritage and industry. In 1942, it was producing the Rolls-Royce Merlin engines to power the Spitfire, Hurricane and Mosquito Fighters and the Lancaster Bombers. Whilst making history with its constant supply of armaments it was hanging its head in the depression of war.

As far back as I can remember I have been aware of conflict. There are always wars raging somewhere in the world and they were raging at the time of my birth. As a small child, I sensed conflict within the family; there were constant tensions between my mother, Celia and my father, John. At that time anxiety and fear existed in almost every home in England because loved ones were either away fighting or working for the war as fire-fighters, in munitions factories, as ARP wardens, as canteen workers or on the land or in other equally fraught occupations. There must have been a palpable sense of fear and danger. Yet, for some, it was the most exciting time they had ever known, full of uncertainty and snatched romance. For many, the structure of orderly living had been shattered, restraints were removed, barriers extended. There was a feeling of buoyancy; of being anchorless. It was a time when rules and boundaries were set aside; ‘Enjoy today, who knows what tomorrow may bring.’ ‘I would not have missed being in London throughout the war for anything,’ the Anglo-Irish author Elizabeth Bowen recalled, ‘It was the most interesting period in my life.’ Of the blackout, she said, ‘Nature tapped out with the heels on the pavement an illicit semaphore.’ It seemed that new rules were being written to accommodate the changing social patterns; risks were being taken, opportunities were being grasped. There was an urgency to live life in the here and now for the uncertainties of war were everywhere.

Home births were commonplace then, although my sister, Hannah, had been delivered in a private nursing home, possibly as a precaution because she was the firstborn. On the first of February the doctor and midwife came to my mother at home; the trusted GP, Dr Eccles and the midwife, Brenda Flynn. Nurse Flynn must have been particularly trustworthy that night because Mum asked her to become my godmother. Although I was never to meet her again,

Brenda marked her presence at the christening with a brooch, still kept amongst my odd bits of jewellery today. The birth went well and I was a strong and healthy baby.

Snow is nature's way of levelling everything. It covers imperfections. A rubbish heap can look beautiful when covered in snow. When the snow melts, reality is revealed in its actual form whether ugly or beautiful and we can see it and confront it for what it truly is. Snow, soft and white, transforms our world but it is always fleeting and when it's gone, its comforting blanket disappears and leaves us with a starker reality. For the first few years of my life, my world was covered in snow. Lies and deceit were like snowflakes; they covered up unpleasant truths but soon the snow would begin to melt. Soon, I would experience the thaw; I would lose the softness of its blanket and be exposed to feelings of icy rejection.

At six months old my senses were developing but I had no language with which to express my thoughts and feelings. I could hear what I knew later to be music. My mother is listening to the radio. Popular songs drift over me, something about 'bluebirds' and 'Johnny going to sleep' ..... '..... the home fires burning' ..... 'I'll be seeing you'..... I can hear my mother's voice. I feel her heartbeat. I am warm, secure and comforted. The colours around me are pink and white and clear. There is tenderness and peace in this warm place.



*Celia and Martha*

'Music has the ability to wrap up the past like a beautiful gift' says Howard Goodall. Music was to be the soft blanket into which I would be absorbed. Music takes you into another world. It tells you of love you have not yet experienced. It describes the heartache of loss and pain. It becomes part of you because it has met your needs by expressing your emotions. It has an extraordinary ability to fill a space in your mind and to hold that place as its own forever. It comes to symbolize your feelings; almost like a seventh sense. Its power to recall moments of intense emotion, whether euphoric or fearful, remains constant and pervading. It encompasses the sensations of individual memory even into old age.

I listened to Vera Lynn singing 'Now is the Hour'  telling me of the pain of separation, the endurance of love and the hope of reconciliation.

I was the second daughter of four children born to Celia and John Barkworth. I had a sister, Hannah, who was a year and a half older and two younger brothers, Daniel and Edward. My mother had given birth four times in five years. My earliest memories were of playing in the house and garden. The little red-brick house stood on a corner plot, the garden was L- shaped with a pear tree against the hedge at the back of the house; a tree that I climbed with my brothers when we were older. Behind the kitchen was a washhouse and coal shed. Later, during summer holidays I, with Daniel and Edward, would climb out of the small bedroom window onto the roof of these low buildings and sit there in the sunshine or jump down onto the small patch of grass. There was an Anderson bomb shelter in the garden. It was very cramped inside but had been used by the family during air raids. In the years after the war, we children played on top of it when weeds covered the shelter like a mound. Eventually, the ground was levelled and grass was able to grow again.

I was too young to recall very much about the war but one of my earliest memories was the street party that was held soon after VE Day. Long tables were set up on the pavement with tablecloths to cover their rough surfaces and bunting and flags decorated the houses and gates and lampposts. Sandwiches, pies, cakes, jelly and blancmange were set out and everyone joined with their neighbours in what was now a peaceful world. I remember waiting a long time for my mother to get ready; she always loved to be dressed well with carefully applied makeup and perfect hair before she would leave the house. By the time my mother and we children arrived, the celebrations were well under way but she had a good excuse; she had to get four children ready as well as herself. Mum was kept very busy with her young family but she was always at home in those early years and always there when we came home from school. In 1946, Churchill made his famous speech about the serious threat coming from behind the Iron Curtain; the fear of the Soviet Union and its intentions of expansion. The war was over but the world was not at peace.



*Hannah*

*Martha*

*Daniel*

*Edward*

The Barkworth children were slim, with blue eyes and fair complexions. I was small for my age and had a few freckles on my nose and mousey fine brown hair. I was utterly devoted to my mother but felt little connection with my father. He was my father but, for some reason, I didn't feel close to him. It would be a long time before I discovered the true state of the marriage; there was a secret at the heart of the story they presented to the outside world. There are many truths we cannot know but we can tiptoe to the edge of revealed knowledge and look down into the chasm of the unknown. This is attempted in science, in the arts, in all fields of research and

development. Why should we not attempt it in our own personal lives to reveal undiscovered elements which will help us to make sense of the whole?

My mother was a strong, powerful but gentle presence in my life. In those very early days, the family seemed to be housebound most of the time. Mum was going through her pregnancies with my two younger brothers; the youngest was born when I was three. I remember going to the shops or to school with Hannah or to church. We were all raised as Roman Catholics, following Mum's upbringing as the child of an Irish immigrant family. There were no such things as coffee mornings or play groups and mothers didn't meet up with other mothers, except to gossip in the street.

Mothers with sisters and other close family members may have been more integrated but since she was an only child and didn't appear to have any friends, Mum's life was particularly isolated. I don't remember meeting a single child outside my family before I started school. We had no visitors. My mother always regretted that she had no brothers or sisters. In fact, she had no relatives other than a second cousin and an elderly aunt. The only person she was in contact with was her own mother, and Grandma rarely visited. The family seemed confined to the home even though we lived in a heavily populated area. As we got older, we would play with the other children in the street but we weren't in the habit of visiting one another's houses. Week by week, the only people the family saw were the local traders; the bread man in his sweet-smelling van, offering fresh bread and cakes; the man selling drinks from the back of his lorry; beer in pot bottles, lemonades, dandelion and burdock - a penny back on the bottles. There was the sound of the ice cream man, playing nursery songs, and offering the most delicious whipped vanilla ice-cream in a cone or in a block between two large wafers. Later, lollipops and a wider choice of flavours would be available. The local window cleaner would call occasionally and we received a steady flow of door to door salesmen, usually selling shoe polish, shoelaces, dusters and cleaning materials. Finally, the milkman could be heard, with his horse and cart or later an electric milk float. The bottles would rattle together as he drove along the cobbled street. In the early days he'd fill your jug with fresh milk from a milk churn. Later, the milk was sold in half-pint and pint bottles and was kept chilled by the latest method of refrigeration. Prior to starting school, these were my contacts with the sights and sounds of the outside world.

Although John, my father, was a presence in my life, he was not a positive presence. Tension levels seemed to rise whenever he entered a room. Sadly, I never developed a loving relationship with him. There was something missing and only my mother's secret would reveal what that was. I remember Dad as a lethargic, brooding, unpleasant figure; part of the furniture and fixtures of our lives; someone, who seemingly had no purpose and therefore commanded little respect. Physically a large man, fat and bald, he gave the impression of being emotionally weak and displayed little empathy or engagement with the family. He shaved every day and had a pale pinkish complexion which made him look smooth and clean. This, however, was contrary to the truth and it was something of a family joke that he took a bath just once a year. Unfortunately, this was not an exaggeration and, consequently, his personal hygiene left much to be desired. He was scruffy in his overall appearance and I remember him sitting, reading the newspaper or pottering about the house, smoking his pipe. My mother did nothing to include him in discussions relating to the family's daily lives and there were no signs of kindness or warmth between them. Any interaction between John and Celia was strained and marked by sharp or negative responses; dialogue was kept to a minimum. There was no conversation in the normally understood definition of that word.

Dad looked after himself; he cooked his own meals, washed his own clothes. He did not sit down for family meals although he would sometimes cook for the children at breakfast or lunch. He lost his temper regularly and these outbursts became worse and worse as the years went by. Mum would put them down to his mental state saying that the moon affected his moods. The rows between them were loud and highly charged. Dad used language rather than fists to score points. Although my mother tried not to engage with him, the ranting and raving which ensued was enough for both of them as he became more and more frustrated. There was no physical violence but the dynamics of the emotional abuse were very damaging and I would often cover my ears to shut out the verbal violence showering around us like shrapnel from an explosion. Many silent tears were shed in an attempt to deal with the stress of these outbursts.

How different this was from Mum's own happy childhood. My mother was a strong character; a product of her own happy upbringing. She was a much-loved only child whose beloved father had died when she was just seventeen. The devastation of this loss was evident. Mum was completely devoted to her father. She had her differences with her mother; the age-old generation gap, and longed to be independent and free. She inherited a substantial sum of money from her father when she became twenty-one. At this point she met and married John despite her mother's objection to the marriage. Mum had exerted her independence and gone ahead with the wedding ignoring her mother's fears. My memories of my maternal grandmother are thin and faded. I can remember her dainty figure dressed in black with a black hat and I can remember her face and wispy white hair. All old people seemed to wear black in my early childhood. I remembered my father's sisters coming to visit one day and we children had to sit up very primly and appear happy and respectful and very well-behaved. We had never met them before and hardly knew who they were. The sisters seemed fond of their young brother and it was as if they were just checking how he was and how his family was growing up. Mum accepted them and she happily 'put on a show' for their visit. To the outside world, the Barkworths must have seemed a fairly ordinary family.

My father never went out except for work or the occasional walk to the shops. He had no friends and no interests that I can recall. He didn't go out for a drink with friends or to any meetings or even to the library although there was evidence that he had been a reader in the past as we had a large collection of Dickens' novels in our bookcase. He went nowhere and he saw no-one. Many years later, my mother told me that although Dad had had a grammar school education and a good upbringing he had, she thought, the mental age of a not very bright fifteen year old; he had never really grown up and had never reached adult maturity. His behaviour seemed to bear this out. My mother, however, was keen to portray an image of solid respectability and normality. She dressed her children well and we always had neat haircuts. When we were very young she bought matching coats and outfits for us. Hannah and I wore brown tweed coats with velvet collars bought in different sizes from C & A. We children were the outward sign of her inward strength, her determination to present a strong and successful image to the outside world.

On the whole my early childhood probably seemed to others to be quite unremarkable. I was happy playing on a little blue tricycle which I rode round and round in front of the garage at the end of the back garden. I adored my mother and the longest time I remembered being separated from her was when I was three years old. Hannah and Daniel and I were taken to nearby Ladybarn Park by a lady called Miss Robinson. It may have been when my mother was in labour with my youngest brother, Edward, because we had to be out of the house for some time or it

may have been because my mother was attending the funeral of her own mother, who died just before Edward was born, I'm not sure. It was a sunny day in spring and we all sat on a bench overlooking the large grassed area of the park. Daniel was sitting up in the pram and Hannah was sitting on the bench at the other side of the old lady. I was looking at the back of Miss Robinson's hands. They were very wrinkly hands with prominent veins and freckles and large brown patches; I'd never seen such hands before. At that moment, the old lady seemed like a creature from a different species. I look at my own hands now and see the familiar signs of ageing and it takes me back to that moment.

When I started school at the age of four and a half I had scarcely been apart from my mother for more than a minute or two. There was no preparation for this life-changing transition from home to school. I cried and cried when my mother left me. After a few moments the tears would stop but the hurt remained inside me all day long. I went for a few days without making too much fuss but, eventually, it hit me that this was going to be permanent. Then I really started to protest and screamed when my mother tried to hand me over to the teacher. Mum would pass me through an open window to get me into the classroom. I remembered feeling utterly desolate; I adored my mother so much, she was my whole life. I just wanted to be with her all the time and felt the physical and emotional pain of separation. This was the first hard lesson I had to learn like thousands of children have had to learn it before and since.

Soon I began to make friends. I remembered being outside my infant school, St Cuthbert's, with my little friend Katie Donovan and her very tall mother, Maureen. Katie had blonde corkscrew ringlets and was delicate and fair skinned. At five years old, she was my best friend. I usually walked home from school with Hannah but I had to wait for her and so it was agreed that I could walk with Katie and her mother. They lived across the park on Kingsway. We lived just near the edge of the park. Sometimes, as we walked along the street, a group of children would pass by on the opposite side of the road. They'd shout 'Catlicks! Catlicks! smelly old Catlicks!' Then the catholic children would call back 'Prodi dogs! Prodi dogs! Dirty old Prodi dogs!'

Our house was built in 1928, the year my mother and father were married. The estate was planned in a very orderly way and there were numerous options for walking home from school. The road names were very familiar: Brookleigh, Fairholme, Hartswood, Heyscroft, Ashdene, Hatherley. I loved the names. In my child's mind they gave me security. They were reliable, they were always there. There was no feeling of confusion and, when I reached the age of seven or so, I wasn't afraid of being on my own. Around this time I became more acutely conscious of my own identity and separateness. There was in fact one single moment in which I felt as though my soul and body had parted and come back together again; I experienced a distinct sense of individual identity. In that moment of clarity, I was aware of who I was. I identified and accepted my own mind within my physical body; my conscious thinking mind was who I was. This was a pleasant and comforting feeling. I liked solitude and I found peace in withdrawing from the world into my own self where I could reflect. I had no idea where I was going in life but I had a desire to please and to do what was right. I knew, also, that I was not autonomous in the sense that all my thinking would be wise, for I was constantly seeking guidance and strength from outside myself. I already had an appreciation of body, mind and spirit. Maybe this came from religious teaching and, despite being very young, I felt this strong spiritual dimension in my life. Many years later, I felt free to choose; to unite myself with God, to somehow join with God in active work in the world. I discovered how, through deep

reflection, we learn to discern the hand of God in our own personal experiences, in the challenges and frustrations of daily life and in the making of important decisions. We sift through our memories and we can see the way in which God has been alongside us over the years.

~~~~~

My home was typical of hundreds of thousands of semi-detached houses all over the country. The rooms were quite small. There was a dining room, a front room, three bedrooms and a bathroom with toilet. At that time the kitchen was a small square-shaped room with a heavy gas cooker and solid metal-framed cupboards. Some years later my mother had the house extended into the washhouse and this gave the family a separate breakfast room, where the kitchen had been, and a long galley kitchen. She was very proud of her new kitchen, especially when she was able to have a twin-tub washing machine and a fridge. Before this, I was going home to a mother who scrubbed the clothes in a sink on a washboard, soaked them in water with dolly blue and then put them in a boiler-type washer. She'd remove the piping hot clothes with a pair of wooden tongs into the sink or a bowl. Then she'd lift them out and put them through the hand-operated mangle. In the winter or on wet days, clothes were always drying in the dining room on large wooden clothes horses, blocking out the fire and creating heavy condensation on the windows.

There were numerous incidents that I recall about those early years. I remember learning the alphabet in infant school and practicing how to write my letters at aged five. I remember a school Christmas party when all the children were given presents. I got a table tennis set. Another child made me swap with them and I took home a cheap little jigsaw puzzle instead. I remember feeling pretty aggrieved by that, as though I'd been cheated, which of course I had. I was already developing a sense of fairness and justice. One of the girls in Hannah's class, Marian, was inviting all her friends to her birthday party. Marian invited me too. I enjoyed the party and saw for the first time what it meant to be part of a family with a loving and kind father who joined in the games and made jokes. During my second year in infant school I was taught by a young nun who belonged to the order of The Faithful Companions of Jesus. Mother Lucy was tall and slim and pretty and wore a tiny pair of round spectacles. The skirt of her black habit swept the wooden floors, her waist was draped with a rosary and her sweet face was framed in little white pleated frills under her black veil. Apart from the usual subjects, Mother Lucy taught music and the children played with a collection of percussion instruments. It was during these lessons that I became aware of the musical beat and the importance of timing; the practical side of playing music.

As well as one to one reading, the children learnt to read repetitively by following the text aloud together and, if any child was unsure, they could listen carefully and they usually picked up the words they were struggling with. We also took our reading books home and I read a little with my mother. The headmistress was another nun; Mother Immanuel was a rotund, slightly stooping figure who ruled the school with a cool degree of authority. Naughty children had to stand outside her door to be 'dealt with.' Mother Lucy and Mother Immanuel lived in the convent house next to the local grammar school and always travelled to school together.

Hannah and I and my brothers learned to ride two-wheeler bikes, helped a little by Dad, and when I was about eight I started to become more adventurous and rode up and down the

pavements and round the quiet streets near our house. During school holidays we would play on the road in front of the house with the two of the local children, Barbara and Ted. They lived across the road and weren't considered suitable companions for us. Mum thought their mother and father were 'common'; their father sometimes appeared in their front garden wearing only vest and trousers and their mother often wore a turban scarf with her hair curlers showing beneath. My mother would wear one of those wraparound aprons, which she called her 'pinny' if she was doing a dirty job, like cleaning the kitchen stove or dusting the picture moldings. Sometimes, she would wear a turban, but she would never be seen by the outside world in either of these. Perhaps this was one of the differences between working class and aspiring middle class. My mother certainly had her pride. She worked very hard doing everything herself as she could never afford help.

Most of the neighbourhood children didn't go to the same school or church which we attended but they were very friendly and I liked them. The girl next door, Janet Benson, lived with her grandmother and her father, Eric. I heard the story that Janet's mother had left her father. I didn't play with Janet very much. The boy who lived directly opposite our house was called Donald and he lived alone with his mother. He sometimes spoke to the children and told them about the animals he kept at home. We learned later that he had been cruel to one of his pets. Directly opposite were a lovely couple called Auntie Pat and Uncle Will. Auntie Pat invited all the children who lived nearby to play the piano with her and she taught us the basic scales and simple tunes. She would take us out to the country during the summer holidays. We would catch the bus on Parrswood Road and go up to Alderley Edge.<sup>1</sup> Walking through the woods, she'd tell folk stories of the wizard and the caves. She was kind and loving and my mother used to say it was sad that she couldn't have children of her own.

Defining moments are not always recognized as they occur in childhood but one experience was to be different. When I was seven years old, Katie invited me to go to her house for tea. It was arranged for Sunday afternoon and she was to call for me with her older sister, Margaret. Three o'clock came and I was dressed and ready in my best clothes, looking forward to the very rare treat of visiting someone else's home. The time passed but no-one came. I felt disappointed and puzzled. Perhaps they had forgotten. Perhaps I'd misunderstood and got the wrong date. The following day, Margaret called to see my mother. She explained that Maureen had suffered a severe stroke and cerebral hemorrhage and had died suddenly at home. She couldn't let us know immediately because she didn't have our telephone number. I was shocked to hear the news and thought how I might feel if I were Katie. I immediately felt a surge of love and sympathy for her. My heart felt dull and heavy and my mind focused on how devastated I would feel if I lost my own mother who meant everything to me. I sometimes wonder whether my sympathy for Katie came from the shock of realising that something similar could happen to me, and was therefore self-centred, or whether I actually felt genuine empathy for Katie and the feelings came from a true understanding of her loss and personal pain. Whichever it was, I don't remember seeing Katie after her mother's death; she was absent from school for weeks and then I heard that she was to leave our primary school that year to move to the preparatory school attached to the Convent Grammar School which Margaret, being four years older, already attended. My childhood friendship was over.

~~~~~

I don't know whether the saying, 'Give me the child until he is seven and I will give you the man', attributed to the Jesuits, is entirely true but there can be little doubt that the foundation stones which are laid in our childhood, are incredibly important. 'You are the product of your environment' is another well-used cliché. Yet, the future of a child is not preordained; I don't believe in fate. We all have to live our own lives, make our own choices and fulfill our own potential by following the opportunities which open up before us. This is, surely, what makes life so exciting.

As junior school passed by, I continued to be 'best friends' with Jillian and Rose and Anna. I sat next to Maria in her crushed velvet dress, which she seemed to wear day after day until it faded to an ashen pink and smelt musty. Lots of memories flood into my mind; impressions, anxieties, fears. In my final year, one of the boys in my class contracted polio and he was away in hospital for a long time. When he returned, he was wheeled into the classroom in a wheelchair, his legs encased in calipers. He managed to walk with two hefty crutches. One of his friends, Francis, would wheel him into school each day and I kept a picture in my mind of this caring, attentive boy who appeared to be so sensitive to the needs of his friend.

I seemed to cope well with the school work and was above average in mathematics and English. English was always my favourite subject and I loved writing compositions. My biggest hurdle was my almost total lack of confidence. Although I was not withdrawn with my friends, I was painfully shy with adults. As a very small child I had screamed and cried when I was handed over to the teachers by my mother; somehow that child lived inside me for a long time. I was described as shy or timid by my teachers and my heart would beat fiercely at the thought of having to read aloud or answer the simplest question. My mother described me as 'highly strung' or 'suffering from nerves.' Sometimes, it felt as though I was in the constant grip of anxiety.

My mother expressed her love by what she did for us in a practical way but kisses and hugs were rarely given. We were all very well cared for physically but we were not showered with affection. She was hard working, well organized and conscientious. I remember feeling very appreciative for what I had and feeling great sympathy for her and wanting to give her love and support. The adults in my life were going through great difficulties which I did not understand. They, in their turn, seemed to have little understanding of what we children were going through. But, perhaps that's how it always is. I had the companionship of Hannah and I was fond of my brothers and glad that I was not an only child. My overwhelming love and admiration for my mother continued; I tried my best to share the weight of her emotional burden and the disappointments within her marriage but there was only so much that a child could do. My understanding was limited due to the significant secret which she held which was associated not just with her own life but with all our lives.

~~~~~

Discipline at school was strict but usually fair. There was the odd time when everyone in the class was punished because the culprit would not own up. I was aware of the differences in children and that some lived in a children's home because their parents could not look after them. These children were under the care of the Catholic Children's Rescue Society. From time to time, my mother would take a suitcase full of used clothes to their offices in Didsbury. From a very early age I knew there were children less fortunate than myself. Every year St Cuthbert's had St Joseph's Penny collections. Each child was given a card with twelve or thirty squares

around the edge. You were asked to prick the square with a pin when you had collected a penny and when you had a shilling or half a crown you returned the completed card to the teacher. Later, when I went to the convent, each class would take carrier bags into school, full of items for sale to raise money for the same cause. The money went towards the Rescue Society and the children they cared for. Large packets of Kellogg's cornflakes were popular items because they half-filled the bag and were a staple item which most families would buy.

During my early childhood Dad was occasionally employed as a salesman. His contracts tended to be short-term and erratic. This caused arguments and frustration between my parents as Dad was often out of work for weeks at a time. My mother returned to work when Edward was five. Her smart appearance and fashionably styled hair left a good impression with customers. She was good with people and an excellent saleswoman, confident and positive in her approach. She worked for the owner of a ladies and children's clothes shop in Urmston and visited customers with samples of their stock and managed their orders. She would go onto housing estates with a suitcase of clothes, knocking door to door to find customers. She did this in all weathers and travelled everywhere by bus, although her boss would have provided a car if she'd been willing to learn to drive. This she never did. When she was old, she stooped slightly to the right due to the weight she had carried around for so many years.

At another time she worked for a furrier. Fur coats were fashionable and she would visit customers and take their coats away for professional cleaning or remodeling. Her main source of income, however, was from her lodgers. She'd put an advert in 'The Manchester Evening News': Room available - Monday to Friday, bed, breakfast and evening meal. Tel: Didsbury 5331. Much later, when her children were working, they contributed and paid their share towards household costs. Mum was always struggling with money and, as she would put it, she managed by 'robbing Peter to pay Paul.' She was living from week to week and had to work very hard to maintain a decent standard of living. The house was mainly furnished with what she had bought when they were first married. There were bare floorboards in the hall and on the stairs long before they became fashionable. Mum longed to have it carpeted but it would be several years before she got her wish.

Dad wasn't able to contribute much money to the household and didn't appear to be motivated to do so. My mother told me that around this time he took out a mortgage on the house. This payment then became a heavy financial burden for her, as she paid all the bills; she bore the burden of responsibility because Dad was not earning. This must have been particularly upsetting for her as she had originally bought the house for cash from her inheritance. Therefore, to supplement their meager income my mother took in lodgers. The first one I remember was a man she had met during her earlier working days in the thirties. He stayed for several years; from when I was about six until I was thirteen or fourteen. He worked as an engineer at Hans Renolds on the nightshift and slept during the day. We called him Uncle Sam.

As my mother worked during the day she needed someone in the house during school holidays and Uncle Sam, although asleep most of the time, fulfilled that role. He was tall and slim; a kindly, sometimes volatile, northern Irish man with a strong Irish accent and always a cigarette in his mouth. He was single; his wife had died several years before, giving birth to their first child who had also died. He had a brother who lived and worked in Manchester, Uncle Stan. He would meet up with Stan and other friends at weekends and they would go drinking together. He was often drunk and in a bad mood and sometimes out of control. He would become very upset and get angry with my mother and argue and swear at her.

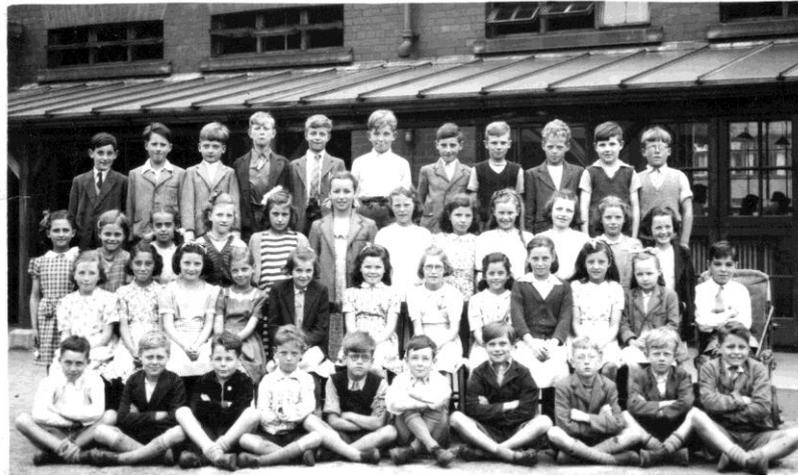
One day, when I was about eight, he came home from the pub and was unable to get into the house so he knocked on the door and shouted for my mother to open it. I begged her not to let him in. I was very frightened and felt threatened by the raging aggression on the other side of the front door. She hesitated but, after some considerable time and repeated banging and yelling, she opened the door and then told him that I hadn't wanted him to come inside. From that moment, he took his anger out on me, snapping at me contemptuously, obviously irritated and incensed because I had reacted as I had. My mother made a small attempt to defend me but she didn't ask me how I felt or why I was so frightened. After a few days, his anger with me seemed to dissipate and he became his usual self again. His aggression frightened me; I felt I had taken all the blame and punishment onto myself. I didn't retaliate or try to explain to my mother; if I had lost her love, I would have had no-one in the adult world to connect with and I couldn't risk that. Even though I was very unhappy following this incident, Uncle Sam was always generous and often bought sweets or little surprises. I remember delicious creamy whirls and blackcurrant and liquorice chews and sherbet dips. Like the black and white Scottie dogs in the Scotch whisky advertisement, Uncle Sam had two sides to his character and they were in stark contrast to each other. Part of me was fond of him but part of me feared him. I never asked Hannah or Daniel or Edward how they felt about him.

A year or two before, Uncle Sam had brought me two lovely dresses; a pink one with rosebuds and a green satin one with a circular skirt. He was given them by one of his drinking friends who had little girls of his own. I fancied myself as a ballerina, dancing and running up and down the narrow hallway twirling and skipping and turning circles. I loved those dresses and they transported me, like Mr Benn,<sup>ii</sup> into my own fantasy world. I yearned for long thick hair which I could plait and curl. I attached ribbons with grips at each side of my hair and tied a bow at the end of them. I'd toss my head and watch myself in the mirror throwing back my hair like Miss Piggy.<sup>iii</sup>

When we were older, Uncle Sam would buy comics on his way home from his night shift. Hannah and I would read 'The Girl', 'Girl's Chrystal' and 'School Friend' and Daniel and Edward read 'The Eagle', 'The Dandy' and 'The Beano.' As a child, Hannah was very quiet and serious. I loved her but we didn't always share the same interests. Hannah was a good reader and this kept her somewhat withdrawn and introverted. She did not play outside very much or join in physical games. I was more energetic and tended to play with my younger brothers, especially during the long school holidays. Aged eight or nine, we would go off on our bikes exploring the neighbourhood. When we were older, we cycled up to the airport to watch the planes taking off and landing. Sometimes I'd play ball against the side wall of the house with a tennis racquet or I'd throw and catch with one ball or two, waiting for the call to tea. Hannah was very bright and did well at school. At eleven, she passed her scholarship to the local convent grammar school 'The Hollies'. I was two years behind her at school and, although of good average intelligence, I didn't have Hannah's sharp memory. My mother thought there might be a slight doubt that I would pass my scholarship so she decided to send me to the convent's private preparatory school for one year to ensure that I would get a place in the grammar school with Hannah. I left my familiar state primary and moved to the large converted Victorian house which was 'The Hollies Prep.'

There's no doubt that the happiest of my schooldays were spent at St Cuthbert's. Although very structured, the children were allowed the freedom to play their own games in the playground; skipping, individually or in teams; Tag or Tig, a chasing game of two or more

children, sometimes ending in a demand for a kiss; ice slides when the ground was frozen hard. We also played hopscotch, The Farmer's in his Den, Ring-a-Ring o' Roses, and old favourites like, Piggy-in-the-Middle; whips and tops and conkers. We'd use coloured chalks to design individual patterns on the tops. The educational standards were good and discipline was strict. The school rules provided the boundaries and were easily understood. They gave security and instilled just enough fear to be a deterrent. The ruler was used on the palm of the hand for misbehaviour. Fortunately, I was a well-behaved pupil – I didn't dare be anything else. I didn't want to bring further pain on myself or further worries to my mother by being badly behaved.



*St Cuthbert's Primary School 1953  
Martha, fifth from left second row*

It was a well-run school and, on the whole, had good teachers whose methods followed the basic traditional principles of education at that time; imparting knowledge and building on that knowledge through rote learning. The main focus was on teaching adequate levels of numeracy and literacy along with sound religious and moral teaching. All this was evident at St Cuthbert's. Regular attendance was essential because if a child missed a link in the syllabus they could be greatly disadvantaged. There did, however, appear to be little interest taken in the individual child, their emotional state or their home circumstances. Nothing was asked and nothing was known. Physical disabilities were accepted and catered for wherever possible but we did not yet have the all-inclusive approach to mainstream education; children who had severe disabilities would have to attend a special school. The softer, child centered approach had not yet come into vogue and was something I would learn more about in later years.

Discipline at home was not harsh. My mother had certain well-worn sayings that would pop out from time to time; 'You'd try the patience of a saint!' 'If you don't stop crying, I'll give you something to cry about!' or she'd advise us how to cope with unkind comments from the children at school. Turn round and tell them, 'Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me!' She also believed, 'Least said' meant 'soonest mended'. When I fell, my mother would smear Zam-Buk - the great herbal balm - on the graze and cover it with a piece of lint and plaster strips or a bandage if the knee was badly cut. She would give me a rare cuddle and tell me that all would be well. 'You'll get over it', she would say. I knew that she had the

answers I needed. Time, however, would challenge my trust; motherly care would give way to the harsher realities of life and soon I would be left alone to heal my own cuts and grazes.

---

**Chapter 1**      <sup>i</sup> Alderley Edge is a dramatic red sandstone escarpment, with impressive views from Castle Rock over the Cheshire Plain to the Peak District. The highest point on the Edge was originally a Bronze Age burial mound, later used as a fire beacon site which would have been lit as a signal to warn of imminent invasion.

<sup>ii</sup> Mr Benn is a popular character created by David McKee who appears in several children's books and an animated television series of the same name originally transmitted by the BBC in 1971 and 1972.

<sup>iii</sup> Miss Piggy was a well-known character on the American TV series 'The Muppet Show'. Known for her feminine charms, she featured in the series from 1976.