

A brush with

LOVE

LIFE

and

LAUGHTER

Created and illustrated by Alwyn Parry

*C*roeso, Welcome, Kia Ora

Now, in my twilight years, I have enjoyed brushing back the cobwebs of time to reveal dormant memories. I hope you will enjoy my humorous recollections of growing up in a small town in Wales during the 40's and 50's. Recording and reliving yesterday's memories is fun; rekindling happy moments of my childhood, memorise of my family, friends and as time inevitability moved on, leaving home to make my own way in life.



I hope my story will encourage readers to record their own story, thus creating a personal journal and insight into their own family's history. How often do we hear 'oh I wish I could remember what Grandma said they did...' so here is your challenge; jot down some of your own recollections before it is too late.

I have dedicated A Brush with Love Life and Laughter to my five year old great-great- grandson, Jack Parry, of Manchester, UK, in the hope that when he reaches my age, he too will have fun writing about his own experiences - now wouldn't that be fun to read!



The windows were totally blacked out, both at our home and along every house on the terraced street, not a glimmer of light broke the blackness of the night. It was part of the British war effort, to minimize the ability of the Luftwaffe navigators to identify landmarks as they guided their planes towards their targets. On this night their planes droned overhead, following the Welsh coastline towards their target eighty miles N.E of Caernarfon, their aim to blitz the Liverpool docks.

Below, at 20 William Street, Caernarfon a single bulb cast the shadows of the fronds dangling from the rim of the Victorian lampshade onto the sparsely furnished bedroom the sloping ceiling and the black blinds. The wardrobe's mirrored door reflected the picture of our neighbour bending over the bed where my mother struggled to give birth to her second son - me!

And so started Alwyn's association with the 1940's and the stories of the times, I hope you will enjoy sharing the joy of love life and laughter that it brought.

Caernarfonshire is situated in the North West of Wales and separated by the Menai Straits from Anglesey. The sandbanks and tidal waters of the Straits edge the contoured coastal plains, whilst Caernarfon's massive thirteenth century castle dominates, guarding the south western entrance of the channel. Undulating hills rise to the east, hosting small villages and farms; the slopes continue to climb steeply upwards to join the moody clouds and the craggy faces of Snowdonia.

The town has a population of some ten thousand mainly Welsh speaking people, and the street where I was born lies in a shallow smoky valley, where the long row of terraced homes lines both sides. Individually painted coloured doors marked the difference of each home which shared the soot-darkened brown bricks and blue slate roof with its neighbour.



During my childhood the sales yards and a large field were situated just beyond the end wall of the adjoining street. Here the cattle and sheep from the surrounding farms were temporary grazed before the week's auction. At the cross roads where the two streets met, stood the massive Seilo Methodist chapel, further along William Street the next outstanding landmark, was Tommy Chips Siop . The fish shop where we could buy a pennies worth of battered crumbs presented in a newspaper cone was situated at the bottom of Queen Mary Street, there the worn doorsteps of the houses were built at thirty five degrees to the pavement to accommodate the slope.

The stony playing yards of the elementary and junior schools shared the far end of the street their corners adjacent to Hughes's fly infested tannery. As kids, our faces locked between the iron palings of the large gate, we would watch the men wearing long rubber gloves and aprons, salt and stack the hides on top of one another. Later they would hose down the blood and remaining gore into the River Cadnant, joining the straw and animal droppings from the sales yards. Combined they would flow past the back of the homes to eventually emerge in the harbour, not far from where we swam.

The old stone schools with long high windows, unsealed dusty wooden floors and a smattering of radiators, were a guaranteed source of colds for all the children come winter, despite the compulsory brown capsule of cod liver oil we were mandatory given each morning. Warming up exercises would often see us formed into rows, distinguished by coloured fabric loops draped over our shoulders and walked out onto the yards. Simple exercises like jumping and clapping hands over our heads and touching one's toes would follow before some competitive element was introduced. Leaving one wondering whether the exercises

were conducted as much for the benefit of the teachers as it were for the pupils. On returning to the classes, a little warmer, the younger pupils would wipe clean their slates and use chalk to practice their handwriting. The older junior scribes would show their progression dipping wooden shafted nibs into the inkwells and invariably marking their distinction to everyone with blue-black fingers. Computers and such things were only imagined in the Eagle comics as Dan Dare took off in his rocket on his journeys of adventure to conquer space.

The rented homes sheltered mainly poor families, yet they were rich in their companionship and the support neighbouring families proffered to one another. Housewives were proud and busied themselves 'brasso-ing' the Yale locks, brass knockers, and letterboxes (from which the key hung), until they gleamed gold - and on their knees, hair in curlers and held in place by a turbaned scarf as if in prayer, would blacken the welcoming worn slate doorstep. The shining clean windows were also testament to their pride, the draped lace curtain ensured privacy whilst creating a backdrop for the windowsill upon which sat a favourite antique or fern, pleasing the housewife and curious walkers as they passed by along the pavement.

Each house was identical in construction with two rooms up and two down and a narrow staircase leading from the lobby. The downstairs rooms compromised the living area and the front room; the latter reserved for special occasions, funerals and the rent collector.

Outside at the back a lean-to kitchen and toilet, and on the whitewashed walls resided the tin bath and washing board. The little courtyard also hosted a heavy cast iron mangle and leaning against the corner was a hundred-weight bag of rationed coal.



Monday was washday and the tin bath was filled with hot water from the kettle and topped up from the brass tap in the yard. The clothes would be soaped and then rubbed and scrubbed up and down along the ridges of the glass washboard; washing machines were unheard of. The hard work would continue, squeezing and heaving heavy flannelette sheets, guiding them through the rollers whilst turning the mangle's cast iron wheel. Then mother's raw hands would use the gipsy carved wooden pegs to hang the washing onto the clothesline, hoisting it up with a forked stick to catch the wind. Unfortunately, rain was not unusual and then the washing would be brought in and placed onto the wooden horse. This hung on pulleys above the fireplace, adding further to the already damp environment and a further excuse for the wallpaper to brown and peel at the corners.

Sunday was the weekly bath day and the tin bath would be relocated in front of the fireplace. The black kettle would boil on the fire and would be used to replenish and warm the shared water. No bottles of shampoo to choose from - just coarse carbolic soap which invariably got into the eyes causing strong protest, ensuring you were accompanied by blood shot eyes as you made your way around the corner to chapel, in your Sunday best.

There were public bathrooms with slot-operated doors underneath the public library, which I think my mother sometimes used, but I never got to experience that luxury. Neither was a visit to the outside loo any more luxurious, as the inevitable task of wiping one's bottom was achieved with the square scissored pieces of the Daily Herald, harpooned with a nail to dangle on the back of the rickety wooden door.

The fireplace was our source of energy for supper; we would be allowed to poke the cinders of the frugal fire alive. With a hunk of bread speared onto the extendable toasting fork it wasn't long before we were spreading the resulting toast with a thick layer of lard sprinkled

with salt, and if we were very, very, lucky, our supper would be accompanied by hot cocoa with sugar too!

Come winter, a pot of stew 'lob scows' bubbled away for days on the fireplace with more vegetables being added daily to make it linger longer. Food generally was short, and my mother would save the packets of rationed Tate & Lyle sugar to bottle fruit in season and make jam. Eggs were pickled, and my mother would often buy tripe from the dedicated tripe siop. Sometimes following Sunday school the family would go for a walk, stopping for a chat, or, if by chance the fishing boats were in we would buy some herrings to take home.

After dad had returned from the war, I would accompany him to the allotment where he grew a large range of vegetables, and late in the evening, having finished their toil, his fellow gardeners would sit in a circle on old upended ammunition boxes to discuss politics or share a story or two as they puffed on their Woodbines.

Sending me to the baker would inevitably get me into trouble, as on returning home having mined most of the fresh bread, I would turn the tunnelled offering towards the wall in the hope it would go unnoticed! My brother was never impressed with the holie offering if he missed out on his toasted supper.

Most nights we would read or play cards or listen to Galw Garry Tryfan (Calling Detective Garry Tryfan) on the wireless, which inevitably had a fit of crackling during the climax. In response we would slap the wooden cabinet (decorated with a logo of a dog listening intently to a megaphone), in the hope of returning on to the station and finding out who had 'done it'! When the programme was over everybody went to bed early in an endeavour to save the rationed coal. Winters were cold, and snow on the un-insulated slate roofs would find my brother and I fighting for the shared ownership of the grey blankets on the small double kapok mattress supported by the twanging spring bed.



The war had created considerable shortages and as a result most commodities were rationed, shortage of petrol ensured motor vehicles were used mainly for emergency services with the exception of the coal lorry and Jack the milkman whose horse had died making his wooden cart redundant. The absence of vehicles allowed the streets to become the playgrounds for the children. Clothes were also rationed and hand me down of ill fitting worn and patched grey trousers were generally the norm. The worn collars on the shirts were often turned or remade till there was no longer any fabric left on the tail end of the shirt, discharged from human duty they then became polishing rags for the housewife. Many had no choice but to wear heavy boots, especially winter time,

the soles embedded with a multiplicity of triheaded iron nail studs to save the leather, but a bonus for the kids as it allowed them to slide down the pavements leaving a contour of sparks.

It was 1945. Victory had been declared! Most were happy, whilst others were sad at the memories of loved ones who were never to return. The children had joined the marching guards as they headed towards the square and the town and country people mingled, united in their celebrations, and naturally broke into song, My father was well known as an amateur conductor and was on leave, it took little persuasion for him to lead the crowd and there is 'singing we had ynte' said an old friend of my Dad's, who had witnessed the scene.







Most mornings we would wake to the departing chorus of echoing footsteps of the steel studded boots and the hacking Woodbine cough of the quarrymen, as they trudged and crunched their way, sometimes through snow, to the buses which would take them to the slate quarries of Snowdonia.

There the men, often precariously, balanced on the steep rock faces of the mountain's cliff sides, would drill the holes for the dynamite and run for cover as the siren blew the warning of the forth-coming explosions. Often men had to buy their own fuse and naturally in an endeavour to save money, the fuse would be shortened, which occasionally led to dire results. It was not unusual to find only twenty percent of the rock they brought down was useable for producing roofing slate, and the waste had to be manually disposed of before production could begin. Today, the waste forms the blue dumps, which scar the mountain scenery throughout North Wales.

Much of the splitting and dressing of the slate into various sizes were done by hand the quarryman using a mallet and cold chisel to split the quarried rock, and a small guillotine to finally shape the rectangular shaped slate. Later it would be manhandled onto narrow gauge railway wagons, which were pulled by small steam engines to the quays in Caernarfon or Felin Helli. Once loaded it would be exported to distant lands or to neighbouring countries. Today the slate has been replaced by tourists and the little engines proudly pull them around to share the beautiful countryside, lakes and mountains.

Contracts varied between quarry owners, but it was not unusual for the quarrymen to have to produce 120 slates and be paid for 100; the excess being claimed by the owners as insurance against breakages.

Faced with the hard work, extreme weather conditions and the everyday dangers, it was understandable why our poorly clad fathers craved to find alternative work and were adamant that their sons would not follow their footsteps.

The square was also the centre of the town's activities; Saturday would see the market set up stalls offering fruit, vegetables, dinner sets, cups and saucers to serve the traditional cup of tea: Welsh Peppermint Rock, and hard to get nylon stockings. The smaller boys would roam about the town freely, fishing off the pier, building bomb fires, playing football with a thread-worn tennis ball banging it against the walls of the end terraced home, much to the annoyance of the occupier, or just trying to keep out of trouble which was at times difficult!

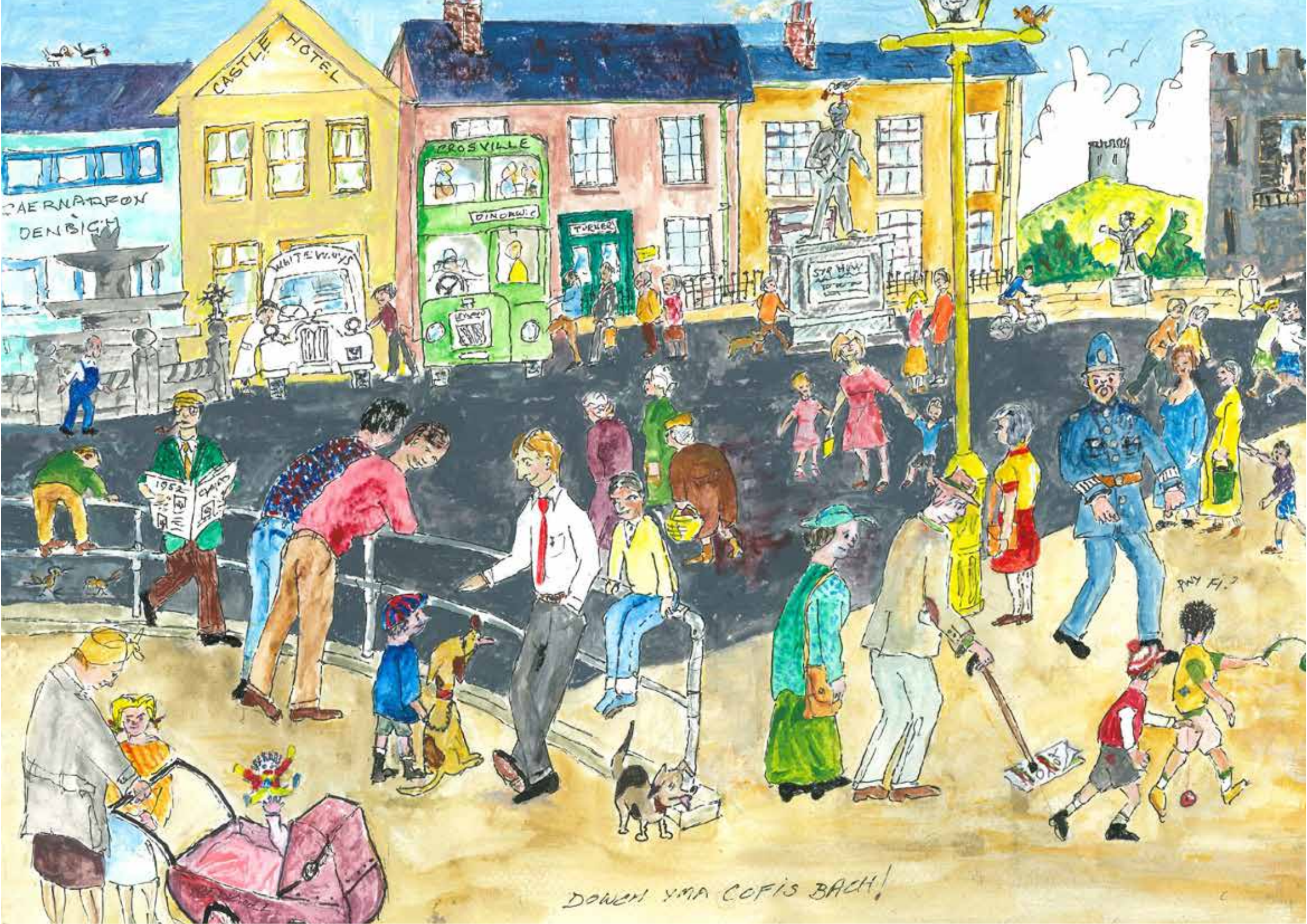
Saturday night would see the teenagers and twenty-plus emerge, walking the traditional route around and around the block via Palace St, under the Guildhall and back to the square. With a little bit of luck, one would catch the eye of a like-thinking female and team up for a walk in the quieter corners of the town under the shadows of the town walls, or in summer time for a walk to the forest across the bridge.

Come 10 o'clock the country boys and girls boarded the Crossville or Whiteways Buses to the surrounding villages of Felinhelli, Bethel, Llanrug, Cwm y Glo, Dinorwic, Waunfawr, Rhosgadfan, Bontnewydd, Groeslon, Penygroes, Llanwnda, whilst the town's teenagers dispersed to their homes. The town would be empty once more.

As there was no television, the Liverpool Echo, evening edition was compulsory reading and the family's investment with the Vernon's Football Pool checked against the soccer results; with nothing to celebrate there was nothing else to do than go to bed.







CASTLE HOTEL

CAERNARFON
DENBIGH

PROSVILLE

DINDWIG

TURNER

WHITEHEADS

ST. HENRY

1952
CHAMPION

ANY FI?

DOWN YMA COFIS BACH!



Many of us had comparative strict Christian upbringings, and the Methodist Seilo chapel had a great influence on our early innocent lives. Here we learnt to sing, take part in plays or compete in the eisteddfod for a reward of a few pennies and a blue ribbon. Attending Sunday school was compulsory, but the reward for attending most Sundays during the year was – fantastic! It resulted in being taken to Rhyl for the day, a real treat, as most of the children never travelled further than they could cycle in a day, and few parents owned cars.

When the great day came, the station's concrete platform would echo to the ringing of the children's studded boots, as excited friends mingled and greeted one another. Finally, after running around through the steam, chatting to Ieuan's Dad the train driver, lifting and lowering the windows by their leather strops, hailing friends and the banging and crashing of doors, the porter would finally shout 'all onboard', blow his whistle, wave his green flag, and in reply the engine would hoot and whistle, letting off a hiss of white steam and, slowly but surely, the wheels would ponderously turn click...clickety clack, clickety clack, clicketyand we were off to Rhyl.



*O*n arrival we would head for the beach, where the braying donkeys beckoned, and a sea of striped numbered deckchairs sat ready to be hired. Soon our families occupied many; the men with rolled up trousers, shoes tucked underneath their chair, their toes warring with the sand. Knotted handkerchiefs balanced on many a gleaming head to protect the sheen from the peeping sun, and the bombardment by flocks of sandwich seeking squawking seagulls.

Empty bellies drove us away from our creative efforts to transport an effigy of Caernarfon Castle onto the sands to a restaurant.

Dodging between hordes of people tramping cheerfully along the wide promenade, past the back of the clattering bell ringing trams, we reached the restaurant. There we were greeted by a waitress in a jet-black dress adorned with contrasting starched white doily collar, cuffs, apron and her black teased up hair, bedecked with a gleaming half moon shaped white cap. I recall my father collecting the cutlery and putting it to one side, stating all we needed was a knife, fork and spoon, the rest being redundant to our cause. It was no surprise - we all ordered fish and chips and concluded they weren't as good as Tommy Chips, but to be fair, nothing could have tasted good, as we hungered more for the fun at the promised land; the fair!



The English-speaking stallholders ignored our Welsh and concentrated on how to wrinkle out the pennies from our small hot sticky, candy-pink, flossed fingers. Not that that was difficult as everything was so bright and beautiful, and you never knew whether you might win a prize; maybe a goldfish in a jam jar at the coconut shy, or a cowboy hat at the shooting gallery. And yes, there was the thrill of driving your very

own bumper car, after riding the elephant at Noah's and there was still the death-defying figure eight yet to come!

Back on the train, tired, we would chew on the long pink rock, the name 'Rhyl' scrawled in red mysteriously and inexplicably through the middle of the shiny white spearmint, gesticulating enthusiastically with our sticky fingers, recalling the great day's happenings, and already planning next year's excursion.



*C*hristmas was the other highlight of the year, except that this particular year, my older brother had told me not to expect any presents, as Dad had no money. 'But Llew' I questioned, 'but... but... what about Sion Corn?' (Father Xmas), to which he had replied that Lord Haw-Haw (the Nazi propaganda chief) had announced that Santa, Rudolf, and his sleigh had been shot down over Germany, and he had been captured and was on trial accused of spying!

I did not believe him, so I set out a plan to wake us both up when Santa arrived. We blocked up the chimney place and carefully leaving the bedroom door slightly ajar, balanced several books across, bridging the gap. We propped ourselves up on the pillow, on guard, Llew, with torch in hand, and looked forward to meeting the man in red. We wanted to give him a drink of Corona's Dandelion and Burdock (Coca-Cola had not conquered Wales at the time), to thank him, and left the carrots for Rudolf.

Mam came in on hearing our waking excitement, Sion Corn had been and filled our stocking with an apple, orange, banana, pomegranate, nuts and a few chocolates wrapped in tinsel, and an animal book about all the wild animals in Africa, and a Corgi metal model Spitfire! Dad, she said, was resting; he had had to help Father Christmas deliver the toys to all the other children, as Santa had had a big fright when the books fell on top of him. So, he left a message for you, thanking you for the carrots and the drink, but asked that we never repeat that trick again.

I was so pleased, as I knew Sion Corn had escaped, and spoke Welsh, because he had given me a Spitfire just like I had asked for in my letter, which Mum had posted for me to the South Pole and Dad had met him too!





There were other forms of entertainment too, and cold winter days would see us head off to the Empire or the Guildhall Pictures to be mesmerized by Hopalong Cassidy or Lone Ranger and the inevitable finish when our hero reared his gallant white horse, and with a casual wave of the arm and a 'hi ho Silver' disappeared into the dusty sunset with Tonto, till the following Saturday's three penny worth of drama. Running home, we would slap our rumps, and by cocking our thumbs and extending our fingers would shoot down the remaining Red Indians we imagined were following us.

Few people had televisions; the first time I saw one was (1953). when I was invited to a friend's house to watch the Queens Coronation Although T.V was in its infancy theirs' was coloured i.e. his father had brought a coloured piece of plastic slightly curved convex to accommodate the screen and painted in graduated dots blue across the top and green along the bottom and fading to clear in the middle. I was about to leave home five years later when my father decided to rent a TV his excuse, for not having one was that he felt it would distract me from my school work.

It was 1949/50 when Goronwy. O. Roberts became Caernarfon's Labour M.P and I accompanied my delighted father to listen to Goronwy and see his inauguration at the Guildhall. Dad had worked hard on his behalf often serving as secretary and chairman of the local party, as well as actively being involved in the Trades Union. Later when I got older, we would joust and debate rhetorically, most evenings, about my stance as a member of Plaid Cymru.

In those days the Guildhall was twice the height that it is today, and it unfortunately fell into disrepair. I can recall my father was nearly killed when a slate fell off the roof, shattering on the pavement and narrowly missing him. Years later, walking along the tropical island of Tahiti, I was to acknowledge his experience, when a large coconut fell off a 60-foot-high palm to embed itself in the sand inches from my head. Such is life...



Come summer we would spend a lot of time at Porth yr Aur one of the ancient entrances through the town walls into the old part of town. It was exhilarating fun diving off the sea walls and swimming across to the buoys.

Often, we would help with Dafydd Aber's rowing boats earning a couple of pennies. If the tide was out, we would use the swimming pool, it was a long walk out of town with our rolled-up towel hiding the knitted woollen bathing costume! Sometimes we had free 1/2d tickets for the bridge, but if we had to pay the 3d to enter the baths we would use the 'free entrance' over the wall when the manager was busy. But our preference was to congregate around Porth yr Aur (Gateway of Gold) on the long summer evenings, and await the sinking sun to bask the massive town walls in gold with streaks of red. The image gave vent to a traditional Welsh song:

*Ar lan y môr mae rhosyn cochion
On the seashore the rose is red*

*Ar lan y môr mae cloddiau cochion
On the seashore the walls are red*

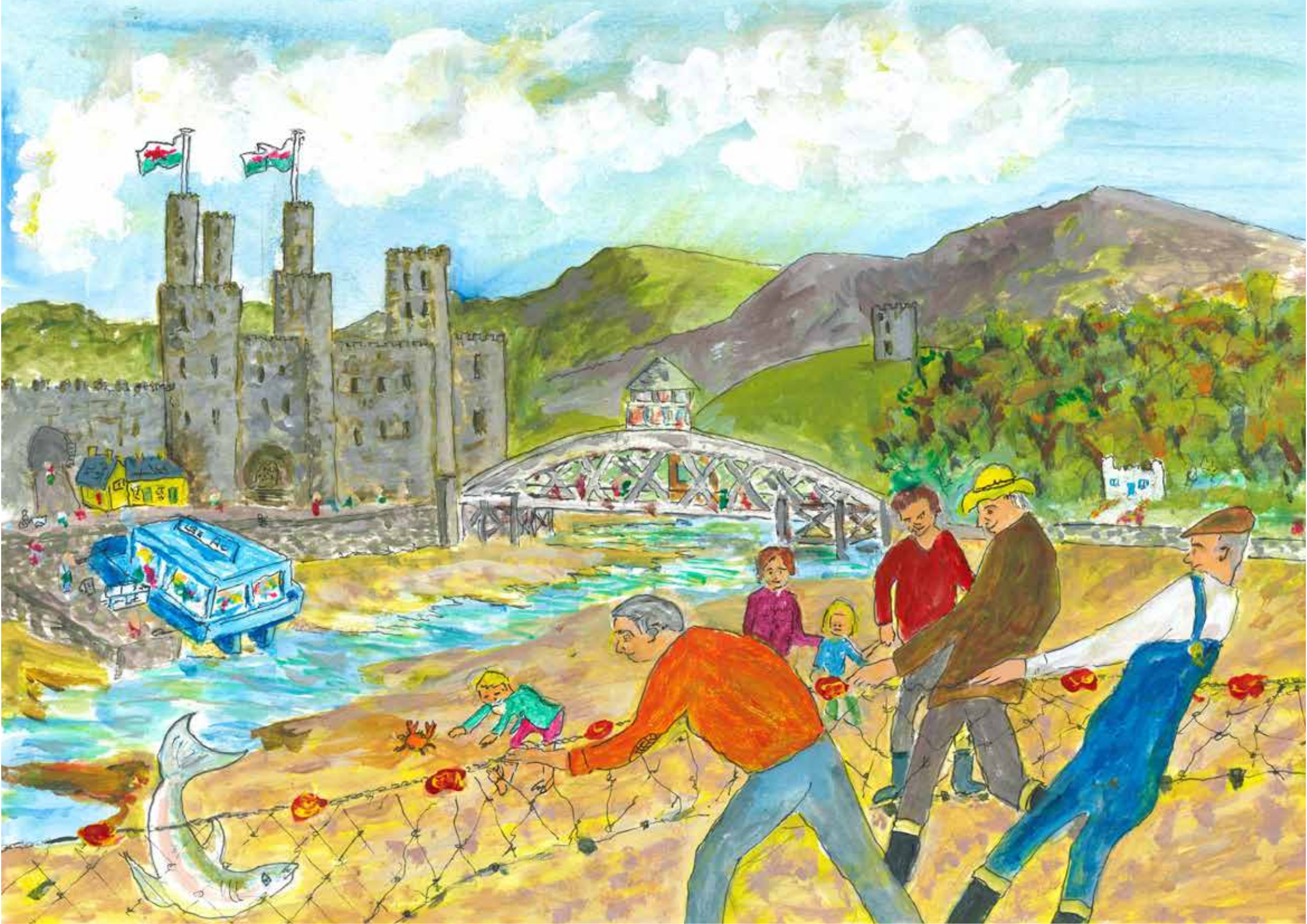
*Ar lan y môr mae fy nghariad innau
On the seashore where my sweetheart waits*

*(Unfortunately the warmth and colour of the words
are lost in translation).*



*D*epending on the tides, the salmon fishermen would stand out on the sandbank holding onto one end of the net whilst the rest of the crew rowed out towards the middle of the channel, before circling back to haul in the most beautiful salmon God had ever created. Occasionally a pod of porpoise

would add further to the days experience and excitement as they pirouetted and skimmed along the tops of the waves. Our exposure to the world was limited but not without the reward of enjoying its natural pleasures.

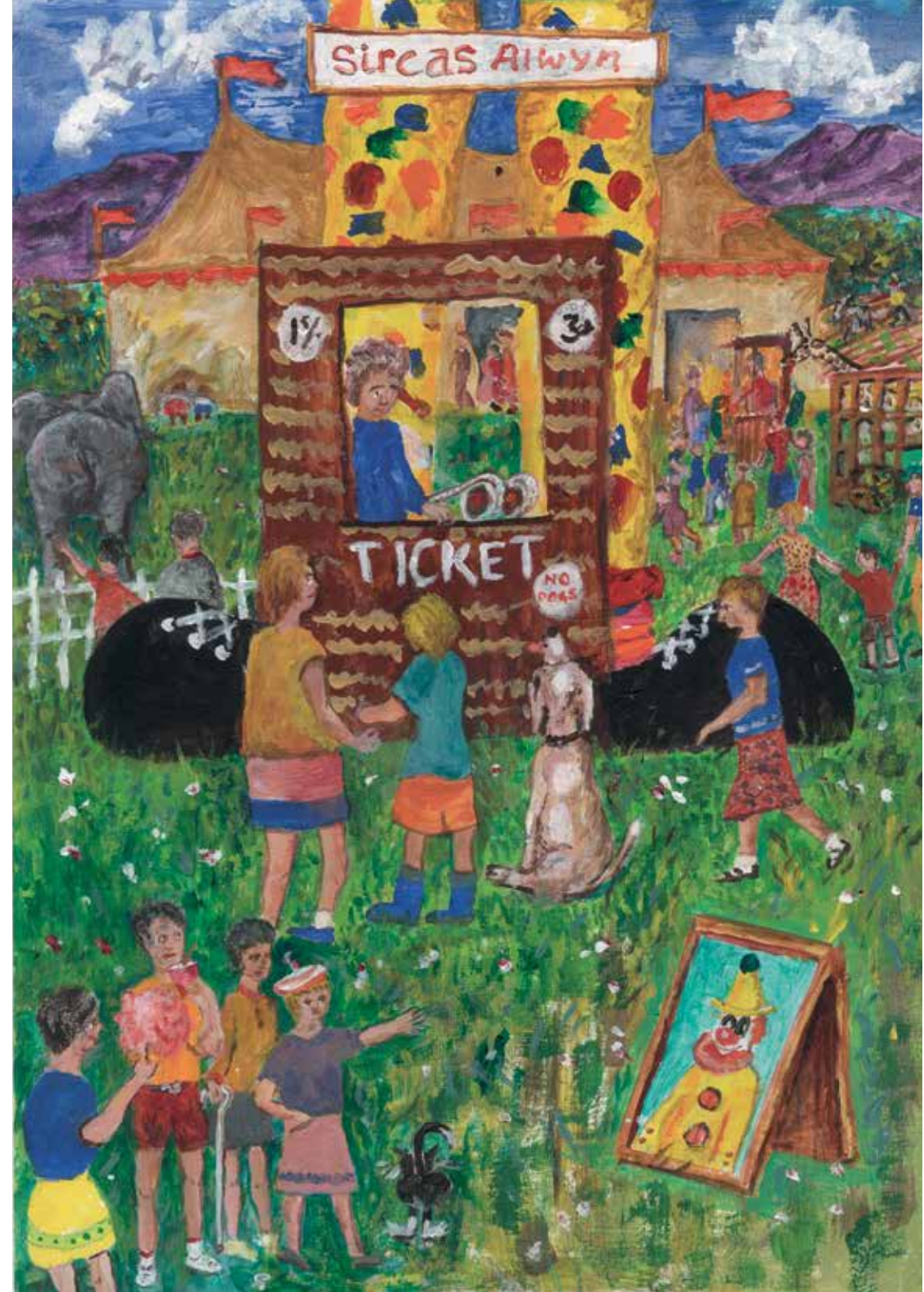




The circus would also come to town, and secret planning took place on where best to crawl under the edge of the big top to gain access, paying not being a considered option due to the lack of funds. Knowing there was a good chance of being caught, two of us opted for a new unique approach. We would ask the clown if she could give us free tickets in return for a big red apple, which was as big as her red nose. All were satisfied with the deal, except Cledwyn the grocer from whom we had 'borrowed' the apple...

A few days later Mum insisted that I go to the grocer shop for a packet of tea. Cledwyn, the owner, was busy serving, but I knew he knew I was there. It seemed ages before the shop was empty and he beckoned me over. Nervously, I kept looking at my worn toecaps and blurted 'I didn't mean to pinch the apple...' Kindly he replied, 'Now tell me, why did you do it?' I couldn't get the story out quick enough; how we had given the big red apple to the clown for two free tickets, which were right on the ring side next to where the lions came in and the elephants...

With a smile, Cledwyn said he would look at the apple as a loan, as 'the two of you showed a lot of enterprise, even if it was a little unorthodox'. However, as we had received a reward on our investment, was it not fair that he too should get a return on his loan? So, in return why don't you and Glyn fold down and stack all the old boxes in the shed for me and we will be all square!





*M*y father had sent me down to Reese the Barber with sixpence and a note, to give me and Pero, the dog, a haircut and not to forget our eyebrows. It was April the first.

Mr Reese was also involved when a tragic accident occurred outside the gate to Cwellyn, with its old rambling gardens. I noticed, Pero sniffing the air and all a sudden, he was off chasing a hare, which I had seen feeding for some weeks, on the big green lawns. Out of the gateway the two bolted, with Pero not far behind and then I heard a squeal of brakes and a mighty thump. I rushed out just in time to see a lady shooing away Pero, who was intent on a pathological examination of the hare's carcass. I bent over and saw that the hare was still breathing, bleeding by its nose and its white eyes pointing heavenly, a large dent in the front mudguard of the Austin 10, witness of the collision. Two little girls had climbed out of the back and on seeing the hare in distress, started wailing. The mother was also not sure what to do, so I lifted the hare up and told the mother to go.

By chance, Mr Reese was passing by and on seeing what had happened, suggested he might be able to help. Rummaging quickly about in the boot of his car, I observed him wetting a large piece of cotton wool from a small blue bottle and then he pressed it to the hare's nose. Almost immediately I felt the hare stiffen and take a couple of deep breaths, its eyes returned from the oblivion they had been visiting and he started to kick strongly. In an instance he was off. I grabbed Pero by his collar and the little girls cheered and the mother smiled, despite the damage to her car. She was very grateful to us both and on seeing Mr Reese wearing his white coat asked whether he was a vet? He said, he was a barber and had used some of his patented hair-restorer!

Later he told me quietly that he would have to re-label the bottle, just in case some of his elderly clients sniffed the brew and decided to 'boul't' it for the Olympics!

This little story epitomized how we would amuse each other with telling stories; it was an art, which I hope we will never forget as today's new technology challenges the old ways of communicating.



***E**leven was a magic number. It was the age when we were expected to make the next transition from junior to secondary school. We had to sit the 11+ examinations in both Welsh and English, the latter as our second language. Passing or not would determine whether we went to the County Grammar school or Segontium.*

The nervous anticipation awaiting the results would seemingly continue for weeks, until finally came the big day, then the whole school would be allowed out to celebrate the success of the pupils.

Those of us who had passed would be carried to their home high on some sweating stalwart shoulders, whilst the rest of the school followed, snaking along behind singing, 'oh Alwyn, ydi gora, (oh Alwyn is the best) y gora, silasi basa, silasi basa, gorilla, gorilla, a jing, jing, a jingo. ...' On arrival, the porter would receive a small reward for his effort whilst the children became a writhing, scrambling mass as they competed for the showered half pennies, farthings and a good sampling of sweets thrown in their midst by the proud parents...



*I*n my first years at the Grammar I did not find it easy; learning French from the English teacher, as it meant that I had to translate both languages into Welsh, and to say that I was not a competent English speaker, would not be understating the case. My mother had passed away during my early years at the school and my father, who had left school himself as a thirteen year old, had little to contribute towards unravelling my homework; the mysteries of Algebra and H₂O were totally foreign to him as they were to me. The relationship between the headmaster and myself was contentious. He would invariably address me in English and I would always reply in Welsh, my political leanings were all too clear to see, from both the Plaid Cymru logo on my bag and the Party's badge which sat next to my Robertson Marmalade cricket playing golliwog, on my lapel.

On one occasion he accused me of originating the painted 'Free Wales' sign on the boy's toilet. I answered truthfully that I had not painted out the 'W' in 'FREE WALES', now offering 'FREE ALLES', whilst responding to him in Welsh. This derailed his initial thought stream and got him onto the subject of speaking English.

Neither was he happy with me when he caught me perched on the highest branch of an almost totally denuded holly tree. Realizing there was a shortage of red berried holly that year, I had a friend packing the severed twigs below, into sacks ready for the market place. When I had heard the headmaster cough, my accomplice had already disappeared and there was little use in saying 'who me?' as I had been caught red handed.

It's an amusing antidote, almost forty years later I met the Headmaster's son when he visited New Zealand (where I live), and he told me that his father remembered me. Asked why he should remember me from all the hundreds of boys and girls that attended the school, he said: 'His father had had to apologise to me, for pursuing me relentlessly for weeks accusing me of a misdemeanour of graffiting another pupil's books with some obscenities'. Eventually, a teacher had discovered the culprit and that I was completely innocent, I was left off the hook, but not before suffering several detentions for refusing to reply to him in English...umh.



I loved cricket and a shiny cork ball, sculptured with my penknife to create a grip for my spinning finger (must tell the Aussies its much better than sandpaper!) was never far from my grasp. However, my father had left the quarry and obtained a position as gardener and caretaker of Cwellyn, an old manor house surrounded by large gardens, the old house was being used to office the Gwyrfai Rural Council. We lived at the back in the old servants' quarters where I shared the attic with my brother, on his occasional visit home.

The gardens featured an extensive orchard, and dad had repaired a large greenhouse and it was full of tomatoes which needed watering for an hour or two each night - thus the evenings at Porth yr Aur were shortened and cricket practice forgone, as I had to contribute to

the household's welfare. During the winter, I would occasionally be pulled out of bed, early, before going to school, to help carry buckets of coal up from the cellar and help set a few of the twelve open fires he had to prepare each day.

My father and I had an affable relationship, except, when my school report came out and that's when he would get me to help clean the offices, wash the floors and wax the desks, in an endeavour to make me realise the sacrifices he was making to have me educated. I can recall the headmaster had written on my report 'it's a shame Alwyn isn't sixteen as he could leave school'. I was thirteen at the time. The memory of my father that day is not one of my warmest and the beating did little to improve my French or several other subjects.





The old manor house's extended estate however, presented me with yet a new business opportunity. To capitalize, I would run home from school at lunchtime to be greeted by a long queue of hungry children from the Segontium Secondary School opposite, and for a penny I would serve each a handful of (boy made) windfall apples. The only hitch being, on return to my own school about two miles away I would be caught by patrolling prefects, looking out for late arrivals, and I would be rewarded with yet another detention.

However, I was not to be discouraged, as another opportunity to increase my entrepreneurial skills and income lay in the form of several ancient large lilac trees, whose flowers I would pillage and bind into bunches. Filling the old wheelbarrow with a wooden wheel with the bunched flowers, I would push it down to my old haunts in William Street, knocking on the doors and greeting each individual by name with an unbelievable offer, not seen on T.V, of 'hello Mrs Jones, smell these for FREE- beautiful ynte - and yes, you can keep the whole bunch for three pence... Diolch yn fawr Mrs Jones' the deal was done and I was only five steps away from the next potential client and knocking the polished brass knocker of.... 'Hello Mrs Davies, smell...'

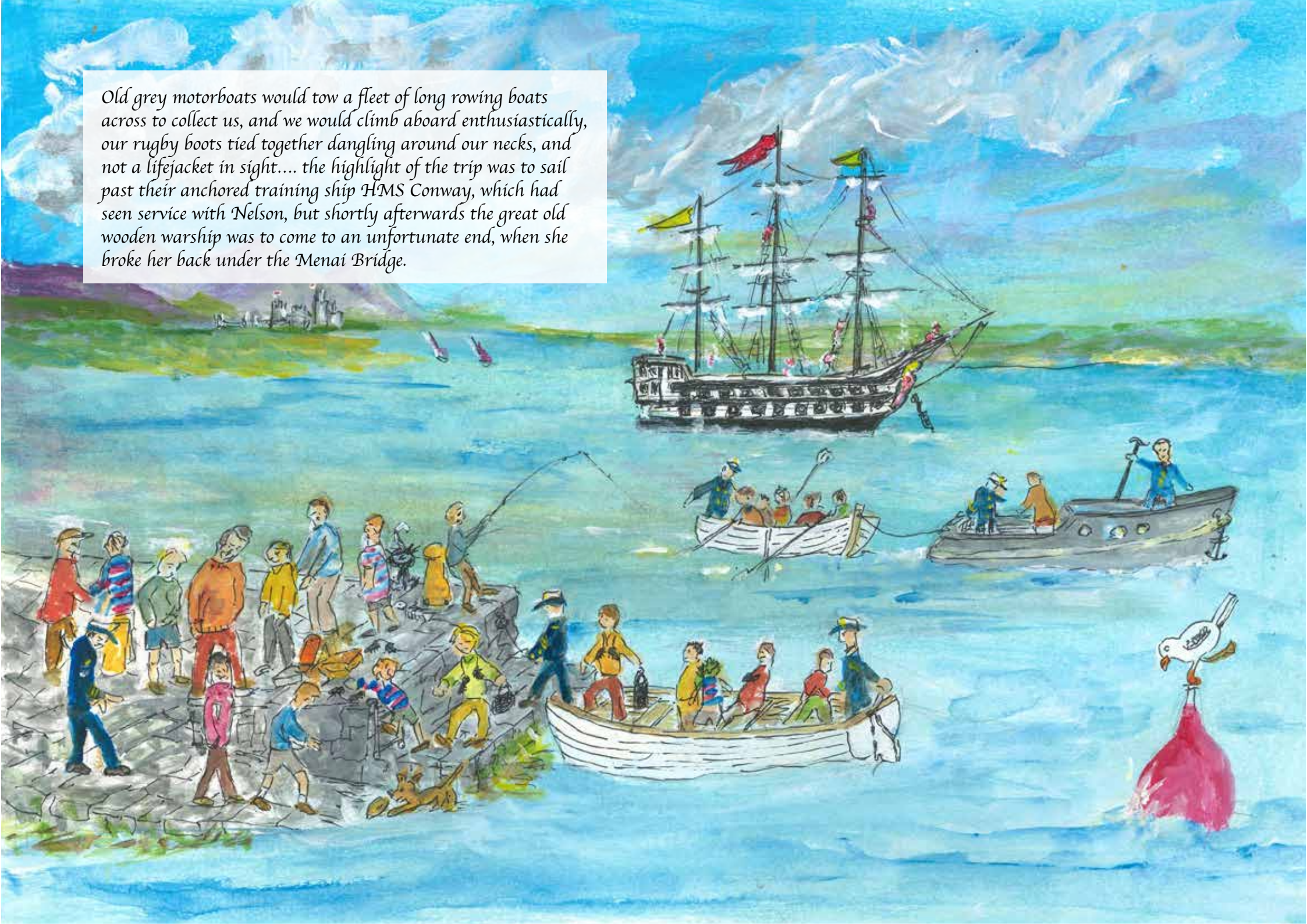
There was still a general shortage of fresh fruit and as a result was relatively expensive especially in winter time, so when an opportunity came to feast on free oranges (thanks to John Jones' helping hand), there was a mad scramble...



... Gardening duties were less demanding during the winter, and I would enjoy playing rugby for the second team. The away games would involve travelling by bus to some distant school, with the exception of HMS Conway, a Merchant Navy training school based opposite Felinhelli on the Anglesey side of the Straits.



Old grey motorboats would tow a fleet of long rowing boats across to collect us, and we would climb aboard enthusiastically, our rugby boots tied together dangling around our necks, and not a lifejacket in sight.... the highlight of the trip was to sail past their anchored training ship HMS Conway, which had seen service with Nelson, but shortly afterwards the great old wooden warship was to come to an unfortunate end, when she broke her back under the Menai Bridge.



The Welsh are renowned for their singing, but I am not so sure whether our efforts to create a skiffle group with the washboard, tea chest, clanging spoons, mouth organ, upturned tin drum, whistling etc would be appreciated. We practiced next to the cold room where the free milk was stored and maybe 'the snuffle group' might have been a more apt name! There were many pupils of my age who became very successful later in life in various fields, but I cannot recall one, who ever came close to being an idol like Tom Jones the milkman.

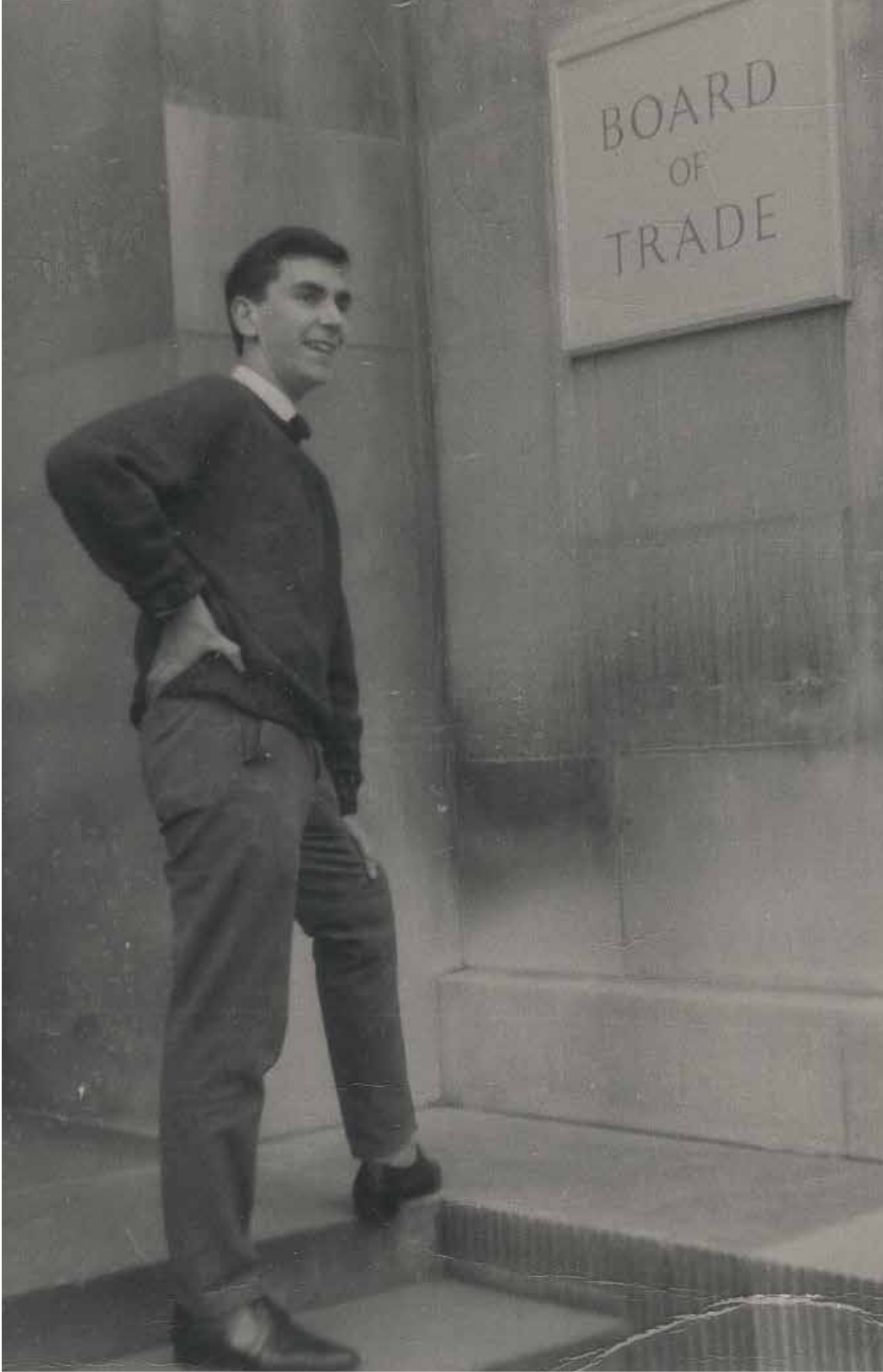
... The love of singing and the Noson Lawen (a happy evening) were often enjoyed, where friends of all ages participated, enjoying hymns, arias and traditional Welsh folk songs often in the privacy of their own homes, or together down at the pub or at rugby matches or in choirs. I hope the passion will continue but with the demise of the chapel one wanders ...

...The Aelwyd (Hearth Club) was a Mecca for us in those days and the Gay Gordons (how language has changed!) was soon abandoned in favour of rock and roll, the twist, or a little snog to the crooning of Frank Sinatra to finish the night.









I was sixteen, time to find a job. I turned down an offer to collect the rent from the council houses and headed for the Board of Trade in London. The name conjured up thoughts of being involved with big trade deals, something in which I thought I was experienced in! However, the position of Clerical Assistant greeted me, in the Companies Registration office Bush House a reflection of my poor educational prowess, which was nobody's fault but my own.

I lived in a hostel in Onslow Gardens, South Kensington, where I shared a small bedroom with three other young public servants. Soon after my arrival I recall, overhearing one of the guys with a broad Yorkshire accent, asking a friend whether he had met the new arrival 'By gum he's Welsh and he can hardly speak English'. I made a mental note to find my fellow countryman, as I might be able to help him, before it dawned on me I was the subject of the conversation!

Then, as today, South Kensington was a desirable address and along the street were many luxurious apartments. A few of the lads had motorbikes or scooters parked outside, whilst our neighbours greeted their girlfriends with loud Eaton accents and parked their latest E type jags, in the middle of the road.

Commuting to the Strand, to a soul-destroying job of filing company returns, was not my idea of becoming a trading guru. Thankfully, I was soon promoted and found considerable interest in being part of the team promoting Britain's negotiations to enter the EEC. Had I stayed around I might even now have made Brexit...

A fellow Welshman, from the Rhondda and myself, on the first of March (St. David's Day), would harvest a bunch of daffodils from the public gardens on the embankment, near the Temple Station, to decorate the office. I don't think the boss was overly impressed as he was often seen wearing a red rose!





*I*t was 1960. Wales had lost 3-6 that day to South Africa in the quagmire bog of Cardiff Arms Park, which presumably the Irish team of today would have loved, given their inane decision recently not to close the roof on the now, National Stadium. The 4 of us had hitch hiked down from London, where we worked, and after the game we had indulged in a pub crawl. It was late, the pubs were closing, and we were drenched and totally unaware that Cardiff had been totally isolated, encircled by the flooded river Taff. With no hospitable Welsh girls to offer us a cuddle and warm bed to share, we called in at the Police Station. 'No', they replied to our plea for B&B, 'we are already full of drunks', suggesting that we walked to Tiger Bay. Our hope of meeting Shirley Bassey was dampened, as it was unlikely anyone would venture into the dark Welsh wet night.

Eventually we reached Bute Street, engulfed in the blackness of the storm, except for a glimmer of a streetlight on the distant street corner. The Salvation Army Hostel painted sign showed up unexpectedly in the flash of the overhead lightning, and we knocked loudly on the door; several times we knocked, until above us we saw a light. A window jarred open and a woman's shadowed head protruded and screamed irritably 'what were you men thinking knocking on a women's hostel this time of night and didn't we know the time?' and if we persisted she 'would call the police', at which the window slammed shut with no further hope of conversation. None of us had the courage to try and knock again.

Finally, past midnight, we found the men's hostel, dark paint peeling, uninviting despite our drenched duffel coats and the deep puddles threatening our ankles. The large iron gate was padlocked and steep stairs ran up to a large door, witness of its past wealthy owner. We rang the heavy brass bell; minutes passed, and the door groaned open. There in the light of an undressed bulb stood a little old man, dressed in a Salvation Army nightshirt and a long-tasselled nightcap of the same purple colour, as the army is famous for. Hunchbacked, the miniature Quasimodo was escorted by a man obviously just out of bed, as he clumsily adjusted his braces and buttoned up his fly.

From his lofty position Quasimodo questioned, 'Did we not know that all hostel guests had to be in by 10 o'clock?' We explained that we were from the North, had got lost in the big capital and had nearly been washed away by the Taff (a master stroke we thought to encourage a bit of empathy), whilst we squelched from foot to foot. Finally, we were invited in; somewhat apprehensively, we paid our seven shillings and sixpence a little reluctantly, and only after seeking clarification of the cost (we had seen one night advertised on the board at 3/9d), he explained the tariff was by way of compensation, as all strangers had to pay for two nights, as they often left having wet their beds. Our apprehension was not lessened, when we were escorted into a large dormitory of about thirty five beds, many occupied by half-awake grumpy, dishevelled-bearded, moaning faces. The manager pointed towards the light switch and departed saying to remember to put our shoes under our bedposts, otherwise they might have walked away by the time we got up for breakfast at 6 o'clock. It had been an eventful day.



*I*t was the early 60's: days of the flower people, beatniks, drainpipe trousers and feet pinching winkle pickers, and buying my clothes on H.P. (hire purchase).

Political clouds, attending anti-nuclear bomb meetings in Trafalgar Square, the Cuba crisis, Sputniks, Enoch Powell and political fist shaking, smog and snogging. In addition to my work in the Civil Service, to make ends meet, I worked at a hamburger bar in Piccadilly in the evenings and come the weekends I would clean the offices of Kodak.

I returned home and explained to my father why I felt there was little future for me in London, and that I had decided to immigrate to New Zealand.

Almost a year and a half later, I had travelled home to Wales to bid goodbye to my father, who was by then happily remarried to Sian; I

shouldered my haversack and walked down to the square with an old friend. There I caught the Crossville double decker to Bangor and relied on British Rail to take me to Southampton.

...I was twenty-one when I boarded the S.S.Northern Star, having paid twenty-five pounds for my assisted passage. I had no passport, just a piece of paper with no picture issued by the NZ Government, identifying me as being Alwyn Parry five foot eight and a half inches tall, with brown eyes. I had only been overseas once, to the Isle of Man on a day trip, on the steamer Saint Tudno, which sailed from Llandudno. So, it takes little imagination to envisage my reaction when I stood on the gangway of the Northern Star, looking up at the vessels sheer riveted steel side, topped with a sea of faces the size of dolly mixtures, hanging over the edge gripping the ships railings whilst cheering and waving to their friends, family and loved ones, standing on the wharf seventy plus feet below.

***E**ventually, I found my four -berth cabins B14 situated down the front just below the anchor. I dropped my rucksack on the lower berth and retraced my steps to the top deck. I stood quietly removed from the crowd, in contemplation, sad at leaving my family, but firm in the belief that New Zealand was going to offer me a new life. The explosive sound of the ship's horn drowned the cheering crowd, confetti and streamers languished in the oily waters, whilst several ropes of laddered knotted nylons stretched further as we were tugged away from the harbour, finally the last rope of stockings could stretch no further and parted, the distant voice of the crowds and the last farewell faded, and we were sailing.*

The next six weeks would see me visit the Canary Islands, South Africa, Australia, and finally New Zealand; my home the Northern Star like her sister ship the Southern Cross, had been built by Shaw Saville to

carry about one thousand five hundred passengers, mainly immigrants (often referred to as ten pound poms) to these distant destinations.

It was to be a memorable journey, how I dodged been arrested with a bribe of two cigarettes in Las Palmas after ambling into a prohibited defence area. Following an interesting time in Cape Town and my first exposure to apartheid, the ship broke down in Durban, allowing me to experience an overnight stay at a game reserve which featured both black and white rhino. An enjoyable interlude in Perth, followed by my first taste of Kangaroo soup in Melbourne and being told that smoking was not allowed in the cinema. At the next port, the early stages of Sydney's Opera House was starting to show its presence above the water line. Life on board had not been too bad either with plenty of food and cheap beer and the friendly nature of several young ladies led to some mutually enjoyable memories,



*I*t was September 1963. I stood in the stern watching the SS Northern Star's wake veering across the tranquil waters breaking like white lace as it kissed the distant rocks where the shrubbery and the contoured dimpled hills joined the edge of the shore.. Randomly sprinkled wooden houses with their coloured

roofs looking like confetti on a lush green carpet, dotted the horizon. A little tear trickled down my weathered cheek. I had arrived at my new home. I shouldered my haversack, puffed out the chest of my skinny frame, checked for my wallet containing my total assets of three pounds ten shillings, and walked down the gangway onto the wooden Wellington wharf.

Now it was up to me.



HIRAETH

Mini clad long-legged lady
Silky mane 'pon her shoulders,
Arms outstretched knees entwined
Perched high upon her throne
Red lips tense and pupils stare
Watching random spinning wheels
Bearing fruit of distant lands

All the cherries in a row,
Mouth agog and eyes alight,
Coins crash coarsely down the metal chute
Outstretched fingers loiter in the gambler's trough

Caressing the tinkling tainted silver trove.
But not for long as just on loan,
Mortgaged to the bandit's greed;
No funds to feed it anymore,
Now she lingers all alone
Now devoid of nowt to do.

Looks around as girls will do,
Welshmen sip their sipped beer
Up and down they talk their passion,
Contoured voices of the valleys

Records blare the songs of England,
Anglo Saxon most are talking
No cloistered choir in the corner
No song to greet me or Jehovah.
Yearning baritone sits alone,
Humming hymns of long ago

Years later, as I flew back to New Zealand after attending a conference in Cardiff I found myself feeling nostalgic and coined this poem.

Kiwi footsteps ring loud and lonely,
Soles abreast 'long hop scotch pavement
'long the terrace of brick and mortar.
Mantled blue by the stones of nature

Prized possessions stage the windows
Shut red doors and gold brass knockers,
Concaved worn blackened steps
Medalled horse guards on parade
Standing upright to attention
Ready now to greet the milkman and his maker.

Oh, how life has changed for me,
Since I sailed for the Antipodes.
Return again to the tipplers' table
Slippery fingers weave the tale
Yearning for those long, lost years.

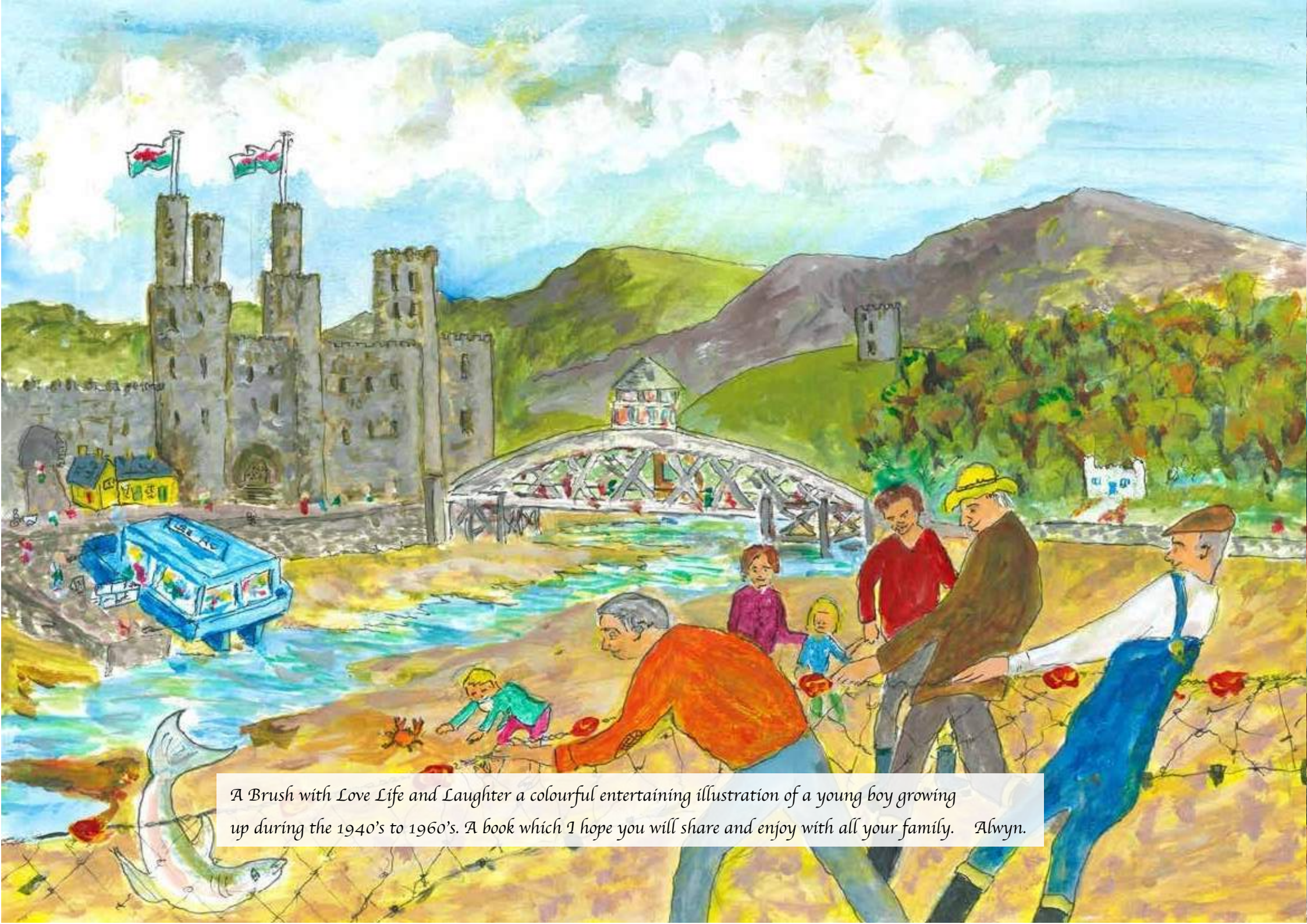
Cymru fach ni fydd hi 'rioed
Cyn cofiwn
hi cyn chwech or gloch.

(My dear Wales will never be the same
as I remember you before six o'clock)



The challenge; why not write a few lines or paste copies of old photographs or selfies on the blank pages provided here and create a legacy, and a gift you can share with all your family.

*My thanks to Vita, Clive, Rachelle, Jo, Winston for their encouragement and help and my neighbours two dogs Tomos and the elderly Fyfe for their patience when I was painting rather than out walking with them. For now, farewell If you have enjoyed A Brush with Love Life and Laughter, you might like to read more about my life's story by visiting Amazon eBook to read The Quarryman's Son by Taffy Parry.
email: taffy.nz@xtra.co.nz*



A Brush with Love Life and Laughter a colourful entertaining illustration of a young boy growing up during the 1940's to 1960's. A book which I hope you will share and enjoy with all your family. Alwyn.