

I was born in Thorpe Coombe Hospital in December 1949 –

My Grandparents were the Tuckers and the Cracknells. Their history and mine, wove deft patterns along Hoe Street, Grove Road, Walthamstow High Street and Coppermill Lane.

My earliest memories of Walthamstow, were of a street party in Hazelwood Road for Queens Coronation, I was invited there by my grandparents Daisy and William Tucker, who lived downstairs at number 74- upstairs to them live my aunt Lilly and Uncle Bert. Uncle Bert who worked at the Triang factory, was a very useful man to know at Christmas time...

Bunting, Union Jacks and garlands of flowers bedecked Hazelwood Road, Large trestle tables and odd assortments of chairs straddled across the road. At the Head of the trestle tables there stood a stage, whereby a pageant of some sort took place, but bearing in mind I was only still a toddler its all a bit vague, but I did know that a cousin of mine I think it was either Olive or June Staines was dressed as a queen and I was so enraptured, I didn't eat my jelly and evaporated milk, nor too, was I interested in the sponge cakes decorated with little silver dragee balls!

However, the most enduring childhood memories were those of Grove Road, where I lived with my Nan, Jane Cracknell and her brood at number 49. Jane, widowed from Ernest Cracknell had 12 children, so it certainly was a busy household.

Grove Road, was a typical turn of the century bay fronted house, with tessellate tiles leading up the front path to the front door. Four rooms down stairs, a long hall with ornate corbels at the turn of the hall, anaglyptic wallpaper and a dado rail further embellished interior. Upstairs, there were another four rooms too. One of which included a large bath with a great wooden surround it, Often, for fun I would stand on the edge of the bath and jump into the bath as if it was a diving board, one summer I spent the entire afternoon jumping in and out of the bath so much so the water came through the ceiling, rudely interrupting my fun and games. In this bathroom there was housed the fearful and demonic Geezer, a large metal affair which roared and bellowed hot water from a pipe into the bath below. Most of the family had a love hate affair with that Geezer and most refused point blank to use it at all, preferring, to either strip wash in the scullery or cart buckets of hot water up the stairs. The bathroom strangely did not house an inside toilet. The toilet facilities were outside in the back garden. In my earliest memories I can remember that strips of newspaper hung on a hook for use as toilet paper or impromptu reading material.

In the winter a paraffin lamp dimly lit the dark outhouse toilet. Many the time I often put off going to the toilet until the very last minute, for the dark swaying trees and the flickering lamp light which was prone to extinguish at the merest gust, were for me, not the least bit comforting as I relieved myself in this outside toilet.

49 Grove Road, like it's neighboring houses. It had a large front room "for best". My Nans house, had resplendent plaster dogs (Alsations with chipped off ears) on the mantelpiece, a hissing gas fire, the family piano, completed the air of bay fronted splendor in that house.

Every Christmas the front room door would be taken off its hinges; and the Christmas Parties would begin...and the house would fill with singing and my aunts and uncles "vamping" on the ivories. The air of total jollification filled the house, Many songs were sung, from I'm going to sit right down and right myself a letter, Bye, Bye, Blackbird, through to Lonny Donagans, They fired their guns and the rebels kept a coming, which had us in fits, as the family trouped through the house on broom stick crutches, ketchup blooded bandages etc... all in time to the music.

Wooden crates of beer stood cooling in the back yard and the children (my cousins) were treated to the odd sandy or a snowball if we were lucky. If we were quick we would pinch a drop of one of our aunties tipples.... before running away squealing up the hall and climbing the stairs on the outside of the banisters and popping through the missing balustrade to relative safety of the stairs

The house also had middle room known as the back room, and long hall which led to the Kitchen, The kitchen was in fact a sitting room of sorts which housed a long sideboard, my Nans chair by the fire, next to the fire place was a sort of dresser with a cupboard below (known as the boot cupboard). The boot cupboard being the source of a chimney being set alight after one day my Nan decided to burn the old boots on the fire. A few boots later the fire had now turned into a raging inferno, the chimney roared and loud rumblings filled the house. I screamed in delight as I ran out into the back garden and yelled at the top of my voice. "Nan, Nan, there's flames coming out of the chimney"! Only to be met with the reply – "Get in here you mare"! Despite water being thrown on the fire- the fire continued to rage in the chimney above us. I think I was sent packing shortly after, as I can't remember the outcome or if the fire brigade ever arrived, Although if I think about it, my Nan remarked to me, it cost money to call the fire brigade, this is a fact I can't be sure of, As all I know I was bundled off somewhere to hush up.

That kitchen with its wireless, complete with valves (which looked like glowing glass milk bottles) – yes I spent a lot of time staring into the back of the wireless! Was the heart of the home. In the small bay stood the big family table, which every one sat around at mealtimes. My highchair was sat in the corner of the bay, so I would have a good view of all the comings and goings. The table in the early days of my childhood was made of wood (pine I think), which was scrubbed white every day. The family budgie, Joey, hung in a cage over the sideboard and was let out to fly most days, alighting on the big china bowl my Nana would be washing her greens in before chopping them and putting them in the large pans. Joey would often peck at the scraps and splash in the left over water once the greens were taken to be cooked in the saucepans on the gas stove in the Scullery. Also in the Scullery was a copper, a contraption that was lit from below to boil the washing in, Washing if I can remember from those days took virtually all day. A day, which was punctuated with steam and suds, and the dolly board, a wooden glass washboard, which doubled as a musical instrument at parties. Mostly, I found washing day a dull day. I would often make myself very scarce and go off in search of adventures with the neighbours or any tradesmen who may call.

Tradesmen who called included Nat, the milkman, who wore an eye patch over one eye and pulled a brown handcart with the Hitchmans Dairy sign on it. The cart I think had an electric motor, which was powered by a handgrip and whirred into life when Natt was ready to go. The Hitchmans Dairy logo was of a stork carrying a baby in a blanket with the words "another customer for Hitchmans" written above the picture.

Another caller was the Laundry Man; the laundry man worked for Westcott's Laundry and I think his name was Matt. Now on thinking about it, why on earth did we have a laundry man? As my Gran was washing for England in the scullery never occurred to me until now... Anyhow, Matt called me Droopy Draws, I think the name may be self explanatory - would give me the big brown parcel, enclosing this weeks clean washing and the new label for next week and I think a new laundry bag.

Other tradesmen who called included the Oilman and his horse. I can, in my memory still see and smell the oil wagon. The oil cans swinging from the tap at the back of the wagon. Glinting and bobbling from side to side, the same oil cans marked his departure as he trundled up the slight hill of Grove Road towards the oil shop further up. The oil wagon and the oil mans shop shared all-pervading smell of firelighters and kindling wood and mothballs mixed with the heady smell of paraffin. Even now can evoke memories of being in that dark shop and childhood.

Other trades people called with their horses, There was the green grocer, a burly, red faced, brown-coated man and his big bay horse. I never liked the greengrocer as he seemed to me to be cruel to his horse and would often cuff it around its head, sometimes I thought for nothing. If it was at all possible I would run round the front of the greengrocers horse look up to the horses mournful blinkered face and offer him a sugar lump or a bit of bread, The horse's bottom lip would quiver and gently he would take the offered treat from my hand. Sometimes there was no treat from me, only just a hug on his old worn face, before the Greengrocer cracked the whip and slapped the reins above his head with out so much as a bye your leave.

The oilman, however, was very kind, and often his horse, was given a bag of oats to eat even when walking along. The oil man lived next door to the Grove Tavern in Grove Road, so I bet the oilman's horse, who was on the home run to his warm stables, was likely to be more well behaved than the green grocers who still had miles more to go pulling his heavy load.

Another, but rare caller to number 49 was the Better ware salesman. I loved it his visits for often gave me free samples of polish, which were encased in miniature tins, just perfect for my toy "shop".

My Nan however, did not relish his visits, and more often than not could not be bothered with the betterware salesman. Sending me instead to the front door to answer his call. Embarrassingly, and to her horror would say.... My Nan said, she's not in!!! Poor man he was only trying to make a living, selling from his battered old brown suitcase.

49 Grove Road was a largish house, but there were some grander ones- I can remember how I longed to live at the house called The Hollies, a detached Victorian gothic style with latticed white gables adorned its steep pitched roof, which was topped with a carved white finial. Thick white lace curtains covered the front windows, whilst the front door glistened with ornate recently polished brass door furniture. The door was further decorated with beautiful glass, which I think where, etched glass. Such a grand façade. But, best of all, it had had an ornate trimmed holly tree outside which was lit with light bulbs at Christmas, OOOH, I thought that was so posh... It was the sort of house that had lace crochet covers dripping with beads covering their sugar bowls.!!

Almost opposite The Hollies further along Grove Road, was a corner store, called Braggys's.

Mrs Braggs, was the shopkeeper and elderly lady which grey hair pulled back in a bun. The shop had lots of drawers along the back wall which housed items for sale, As I mostly could not see over the counter I can only remember one drawer being marked candles.. However, the front of the counter which had a marble slap for butter and various packs of sweets. One pack I can remember was a tray of liquorices in various shapes, from pipes, rolls, flat ribbons, and loops. But by far the most interesting and delightful items Mrs Braggs should were those kept in the glass-lidded tins labeled Peak Freans or Kemps biscuits. From these you could choose to purchase 1/2lb of custard creams, or shortbreads, or what ever took your fancy. At the end of the line was my favourite tin the broken biscuit tin. If, Mrs Braggs were in a good mood, she would often let you take one biscuit own of your own choice from the broken biscuit tin. I don't remember getting to choose very often, perhaps it was a hard life being a widowed shop keeper? Mrs Braggs also sold a fore runner to Beechams powders called Daisy Powders, My Nan swore by Daisy Powders from anything from a cold, pneumonia, coughs, headaches, heartaches,

toothaches and her knees....I never knew was wrong with her knees, by she would curse around the kitchen saying Cow Son, Knees....at such times, I would beat a hasty retreat.

Further along Grove Road was a Mission Hall, with a faded Jesus and the light of the world picture, As a child, I didn't like that picture, it was to me, very creepy- so creepy I wouldn't look at it. Or more to the point any of the others that bedecked the mission, just in case they were even creepier.

Some afternoons, during the week, a feeble treble voice(s) was heard singing from deep within the mission hall. I never ventured in to find out who was singing. It was only the jumble sales that only held my attractions.

Moving further along Grove Road going towards Whipps Cross, you came to the Cross roads and over the road, where the cluster of local shops. Mr. and Mrs. Bass the greengrocer sat in residence amongst the cabbages and spuds, inside that cold shop they often huddled around their portable black Aladdin paraffin stove. These stoves were later banned as they were very easy to knock over and many a house fire was caused through those unstable heaters. Next to Mr and Mrs Bass, was George the Butcher, George was a cheerful man who made his own sausages, I loved to watch the meat go into the machine and it squirt out into the long tube at the foot of the machine. When the tube was full. He would cut the giant sausage and knot the end. Whirl it around and low and behold links of sausages appeared. To me it was magic. Next to Georges was the post office was a dark shop with a telephone box inside the shop, this telephone box would often trap me inside with its bi fold door. I never went into the box to telephone anyone - I just went in there to see if I could get out, which very often I couldn't – much to the annoyance of the post office man. The big bakelite telephone with the twisted rope cord attached it to the coin machine which had button A and Button B emblazoned over it fascinated me, as to, the telephone directories which were hard bound hanging in different colours differentiating between the letters of the alphabet. The only colour I can remember was the blue S - Z, Once, I looked up Tucker, to see if my parents had a phone... that may been hidden in our house, away from my sight, in order that I couldn't fiddle with it and't break it... Stupid child.

Mostly, No one I knew was rich enough to have their own telephone except my Uncle Len and Aunt Rene who lived at Chingford in a Bungalow. - That in hindsight, was another world away.

Next to the post office was Marilyn's the sweetshop. Marilyn was just how you could imagine a Marilyn to be, a peroxide blonde, buxom lady with bright red lipstick, I liked Marilyn, mostly as she would give me the odd sweet and I would run an errand for her in return

Next to the sweet shop was Mrs Consby's. Mrs Consby's was a draper's shop, which had an early closing day (Thursday) I think. The shop had a yellow Perspex blind, which she pulled down on sunny days to protect her stock in the window from fading. She sold baby dresses, knitting wool, skeins of embroidery silks and Ladies items. These items were double wrapped and you had to promise that you would take them straight home and never unwrap in public – even at the pain of death!!

Mrs. Consby's shop smelt of lavender, linen and had a chair for you to sit on whilst you were being served. She was a most proper lady and I wonder what on earth should would think should she venture up the road past Harry's the grocers shop into West Street.

Now, I was often told never to go into West Street.... Never, ever, ever, West Street was not like Grove Road, which was by comparison genteel with its wide pavement, hedged front gardens and trees lined road. West Street however, had no such embellishments, only terraced houses crammed together, with front doors that opened up onto the very narrow pavement outside. Washing was strung like prayer flags, across the narrow road, with its tight terraced houses occupied by wildly shouting women and children. Once, despite the warnings I did venture into West Street and got about 20 foot into the road, when a kid punched me on the nose and I ran

back into Harry's the grocers screaming and bleeding. Harry washed my face and said.... I wont tell your Nan.... That remark gave me great solace and I stopped sniveling immediately, for I knew that along with the sore nose, should my Nan have found out about my excursion, I would have been given a wallop which would have resulted in a even sorer backside.

Besides being a kindly man who never "ratted" on me he also sold the most delicious home cooked ham. Proudly the ham joint sat resplendently covered with golden breadcrumbs on a bold on a large white china stand. Harry could carve the slices either with his caving knife to wafer thin slices or man sized slices, or it could go on to his slicing machine, which also served to slice the bacon! Now that's a smell I miss the smell of cured bacon hanging up in a shop takes me back, Not like the sad vacuum backed sterile bacon the is offered today.

Perhaps the crowning glory of Grove Road, was the Grove Tavern. The landlords were Nancy and Horrie Darlington. Nancy was the workhorse and Horrie was the mein host.... In its earlier days it had a snug, or a ladies bar, where Mrs Braggs would go with my Nan for their Stouts to fortify them for the days ahead. A lady called Ivy often accompanied them and the three sat holding court and chewing the fat over the day's events. I was never allowed in the snug; I only stood outside with my lemonade and arrowroot biscuit. Sometimes I had crisps, with the blue salt sachet, hidden inside the bag. You had to be careful to find the salt and not eat by mistake. As a child crips were not packaged as well as their counterparts today and very often were not at all crisp as their name suggested but infact were soggy and very unattractive

The Grove Tavern also housed a spectacular assortment of bric a brac, from scorpions, knives from the First World War, to things that would now not be out of place gracing The Antiques Roadshow. But, most of all The Grove Tavern, it was home to my beloved Judy, their elderly - no actually, ancient. Alsatian dog... I always wanted a dog, and Horrie often placated me with the statement, "Your dad said that you can have the pick of the litter when Judy has her next litter of puppies". I lived my then young life ever hopeful that the she would produce a litter any moment - surely as she lay by the fire panting this must mean something was happening; and bundles of puppies would be produced any minute from somewhere. The facts of life at 6 were something I was not aware of

Like most children, playing out (with the exception of Sunday, when that was a no trousers and quite stay in day!) Provided a large part my small Childs day. Grove Road offered me riches beyond belief as Shaftsbury Avenue – Shaftsbury as it was called - was almost immediately opposite my Nans house.

Shaftsbury Ave was the place to be, it was a small road which bisected Granville and Grove Road, and It had relatively no traffic and large flank walls on the end house, which were just perfect for chalked goal posts or cricket stumps or rounders markers.

Skipping ropes often made of redundant washing line swung wildly across the road, as to did the Higher and Higher higher ropes that tested our prowess and high jump abilities.

In this road at one point near to the Grove Road end, the pig bins sat. These pinky beige co joined large dustbins, marked with black writing reading Pigs, sat side by side. The local residents filled these bins, with their food scraps for collection at some point in the day/week. It was often my job to carry the potato peelings over the road and put it in the bin. Sadly no one I know can remember the pig bins, nor have their passing. As to where the pigs lived or where the pig food went, that too remains a mystery.

Next to the pig bin was a large bin yellow bin with the words Gravel written on it. That gravel bin for me was my Stagecoach, and once when I was playing Wells Fargo, I fell straight off onto my elbow, grit and pig swill embedded into my elbow and forearm. I screamed and screamed, My Nan who in her back kitchen even came to the front door recognizing my plaintiff wailing even at that distance. It's my guess that I must have had a pair of lungs!!

Knock down ginger was a pastime we indulged in, sadly for the residents of Shaftesbury Road who were often the victims, However, not many privet hedges shielded us in Shaftesbury; so mercifully that road was spared the worst of our delinquency!

Hurling up and down the road on my cycle (a red Gresham Flyer – a tricycle with a boot arrangement was my preferred pastime. Mick Sayer a local boy who lived on the end house of Shaftesbury and Granville road was a victim. Mick was in the firing line of my hurtling velocipede, as it rounded the corners at breakneck speeds without the use of a bell to inform of my impeding arrival. For the sake of safety, at the last minute I would just yell something like, “Awt, of the way” as I rushed past. Mick did not heed such a warning and I crashed into him and knocking him flying without a backward glance as to his plight.

The boot on the tricycle served as a container for my treasures, a pillion for passengers and teddies, and once for an ambulance for a cat.

This black and white cat was found in the road, which I took it home to make it better. Only I forgot about it for days. Fly ridden and rotting it was found in the boot of the cycle. When asked how on earth did it get there, I told my Nan that I found it in the road, it was all still and flat, so I poked the sausages that it had eaten back into its tummy and took it back to make it better, only I forgot about it. Death in childhood had not actually touched me yet for I still believe that you didn't die, you fell over and got up later. In reality, unbeknown to me, the cat was a dead as a doornail when I found it found it, the fact that its intestines (the sausages as I called them) spilt out from the cat's abdomen verified that fact, so no more was said about that instance.

Out on Shaftesbury the passing seasons saw new fashions in the games we played. Conkers, snowballs, Five stones, Jacks, Two Balls, Swapsys, marbles, hopscotch and handstands and bulldog, all came round season after season, interrupting the eternal Footy, Rounders and Roller skating.

Roller-skating often marked the men from the boys and the haves from the have nots. As you were really somebody if you had a pair of Jacos with their smooth rubberized ball bearing enhanced wheels. Especially, if your Jacos were Jaco's seniors which had the large leather top caps. Lesser in the pecking order was jacco juniors. Lower down in this order was the metal-wheeled, tooth loosening, roller skates, which rumbled and grated along. If you owned these, you were just given a small nod of acknowledgement and only your prowess as a skater ever got you to the front of the line.

Other toys that game and went were Davy Crockett Hats, a fur tea cozy type hat with an animal tail hanging down. – very fetching I'm sure. Cap guns, and pop guns and toy rifles completed the outfits as did Cowboy Hats and fringed waistcoats – Indian Headdresses and bows and arrows were all necessary accessories to play cowboys and Indians in the conducted from the front gardens of the houses in Shaftsbury, (regardless of whose house it was!!)

Scooters too were popular; especially those that had the back foot brake and spoked wheels. I never had one of those, I had a red hand me down which had solid wheels and worn rubber tyres a broken foot board which no one really ever asked me to” Lets 'ave a go onnit “

The best “ Lets have a go on it” were the jiggers... These homemade carts called fashioned from an orange box atop a pair of pram wheels, where at sometimes the ultimate toy. These death traps complete, with string for steering and lumps of wood as a brake, carted us off down the hill of Grove Road, down towards the busy main Road of Hoe Street below. The larger versions offered a back “ dickie seat” especially useful for riding shotgun. Today, these toys would today have the average health and safety officer frothing at the mouth.

Now Hoe Street was a bit out of bounds for me, but as the jiggers often carted you off to the bottom of Grove Road, we had a bit of time to have a look around. If I can remember there was on one side of the road a garage which housed the Dyers coaches – charabangs as they were called in those days... Later Dyers became Grey Green coaches and their stock of coaches seemed to move more towards the more modern looking vehicles. On the opposite side to the Dyers Garage was a little row of shops. One of which belong to a foreign sounding man who upholstered chairs. He had his beloved sewing machine near to the window. He spoke very little to us children. When he did speak, I could not always understand him with his thick accent. Next to the upholsterers shop and nearer to the corner was the barbers shop with a striped pole.

In Hoe Street and next to the barbers on the corner of Grove Road there one stood a large house. This was known as the old doctors house It has since long gone and flats have taken its place. The old doctors house had boarded up windows, and as far as I know remained empty for many years, the only signs of life from that old house, were of the fragrant roses which tumbled over the fence into Hoe Street.

As I got older I was allowed more access to Hoe Street. The excursions included a visit to the Misses Wasties Stores, again this was rather similar to Mrs Braggs General Store, only the stock as far I as was aware was a little more on the “past the sell by date” and therefore the errands to that shop were only in dire emergencies. I remember very little about the shop other than the biscuits being a little stale, and the lady was very softly spoken, the interior of the shop was quaintly old fashioned too.

Very near the Wasties Stores, was the Pet shop. I loved the pet shop and would often go to have a look into the puppies pens, and kittens cages, longing for dog or cat of my own. No such luck though, a gold fish and hampsters that made Houdini look a rank amateur were my pets. I actually had a hamster for such a short length of time, it remained nameless !!

Talking of pets, near to the pet shop was the PDSA, here you could take your sick animal to see the vet for nothing. The worst thing about the PDSA was the sad little creatures who went in and never came out. PTS.... That’s what they had! It took me until I was about 10 to find out what PTS was – My friend had to tell me it wasn’t a disease, it was they were put to sleep! Gassed in an oven they were! Her words, not mine!

Enough of Hoe Street, Walthamstow for me as a child was magical, with events, like the Carnival, which would snake along Walthamstow, The High Street, with its stalls, and hustle and bustle. The large houses, that were evidence of former wealth and grandeur. Epping Forest and the wandering cattle the top of Lea Bridge Road, (sometimes they even made it as far down as Bakers Arms! The Steam trains which puffed and chuffed along Selborn Road, Lloyds Park with its bandstand and the little theatre on the island on the middle of the pond. The Walthamstow Granada (where I saw the Beatles!) who had a uniformed commissioner used to keep us in line before entering the foyer! Coupled with wonderful mix of people from all backgrounds are still obviously in my blood and I wouldn’t change it for a minute.

I wonder was it the place, or was it the time – or was it both?

