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I read with a lot of nostalgia the one place that is emblazoned in my heart, Walthamstow. I was born in a nursing home in Stanmore Middlesex in 1943, due to either, no room locally, or those terrible "Doodlebugs". I never found out. My name was Nobby.

We lived at 61 Greenleaf Road. My mum and dad Lionel and Eddie Cole ran the grocery store on the corner of Hoe St and Hathaway or Gaywood Rd. during the war. Their good friends were Ernie and Auntie Bill Halfacre and their two children, Gordon and Phyllis .Both parents were members of the Hoe Street Club.

After the war we found ourselves at Block G .121 Priory Court. My mum and dad now worked together at Eveready Batteries in Forest Rd. Mr. Mendum was the caretaker at Priory Court. He hated me. All because I'd make a dartboard of the shed doors for my dart tipped bow and arrow.

I loved Walthamstow Ave. Football Club, which was then, at Green Pond Road. I still remember the two blue hoop shirts, and the great day when the Avenue played a team from Africa that played football barefoot. I remember Stan Gurula, the goalkeeper, and Jimmy Lewis. His father owned a toy store in Forest Road. Apart from toys, Mr. Lewis also sold fishing rods and in Oct/Nov, Fireworks! I'd stand with my guy outside Shepherds the newsagent in Forest Road. Looking for pennies and sometimes, thruppenny pieces as people came and went from the sea of red trolley buses. Friday night was always the best night to increase my hoard of penny bangers. Saturday night was better at the Lord Palmerston or though you would have some competition from the cockle and whelk stall outside.

I went to Forest Road Infant's School right opposite the Police Station. I always wondered what they did with the dogs that where tied up in the police station back yard. I went on to Blackhorse Road Junior School then on to William McGuffie Secondary Modern. Denis Payton of the Dave Clark Five was in the same year, but different class.

My life was the High Street. As we was poor, I had a tea round, when I seven. I used to go around the stalls on Saturdays to get tea for the stall holders. I'd venture into the O.K. cafe on Buxton Road many a time with the tin Billy cans to pick up tea and bacon sandwiches from Jack and Bridie, the owners. The

Dominion Cinema was opposite and that was the venue for Saturday morning pictures, along with the Granada and the Bell (which we called the flea pit). Rossi's, Wally Clare the fishmonger, George Orris, the fruit and veg. guy, and of course Harry Gore who used to sell horse meat from a stall outside the tobacconists, whose name I forget (next door to the off license on the corner of Buton road and High Street).

There was also the old man who sold nothing but chestnuts. He was in many ways the warmest man on the street. I was there the day that George Orris was attacked with an axe by a person named Eric Horst, who was one of the local villains.

I remember the Sainsbury store next to Rossi's where they patted half pounds of salted and unsalted butter. In between Clare's and George Orris was an alley, which was dominated by the one and only, Harry Almond. Harry used to rent the stalls along that stretch of High Street and when he was not setting up stalls in the early morning and dismantling them in the evening, he could be found in his other office, The Cock Tavern. Rosin's the bakers, Burtons, British Home Stores and Woolworth's, and the stall with the big lady, on the corner of High Street and St James Place, who sold rabbits chickens and eggs. I'd watch them set up there stall, hanging up dead chickens and rabbits for the days market. If you brought a rabbit. he'd hang it from a steel hook and in a flash, skin it before you eyes.

Everything was wrapped in newspaper, eels, fish, horse meat, chickens and rabbits. My competition on the tea round was a scruffy lithe kid named Terry. Somehow, he always looked poorer than me. He always had his arse hanging out of his trousers. He was an industrious little sod with a charming smile. His cry of "any tea mister" preceded my arrival to the stall holders on many a Saturday, and was told that Terry had already gotten there tea.

One Saturday, I was watching the parade they had in Walthamstow every year (I forget the occasion). The floats where coming down Northcote Road. I was standing by the old iron railway bridge, waiting for the parade to pass, when I heard these chilling screams from further up Northcote Road. I ran up to see what the commotion was and was quickly ushered away by some adults. Through the wall of people, I could see a bloody coat in the middle of the road. Why were people still, screaming and crying where a large lorry had come a stand still in the middle of the road? Then I heard a sobbing lady tell her friend that some kid had been run over by the back wheels of the lorry. It was Terry. He had apparently seen his elder brother on one of the floats and eagerly wanted to join him. He mistimed his jump and was dragged under the rear wheels of the lorry. He was killed instantly. I remember running home sobbing

to my parents and my sister, my friend Terry is dead . I had nightmares about his death for a long time.

I worked the market during the school holidays. Thursday Morning, Fridays and Saturdays. I sold ladies hats on the stall right outside Rossi's, pickled onions on the other side of the road, and cosmetics on the corner of Buxton Road and High Street. The people who owned the stall, also ran the off license on the corner. Raul (forget her name, but I know it's welsh). As with all kids, you helped the milkman and the baker. Ours was Hitchman's Dairies and Holdstock's the bakers. I used to love the horses they kept in the alley off Hoe Street next to the Granada. There was a blacksmith there too.

Who can forget the Walthamstow Baths next to the library. Bateman's the model shop, where I'd spend hours just window shopping. Russell's the toy and model shop on the corner of Forest Rd. and Hoe Street and my favourite, Moxoms on Forest Rd. Name it, Moxoms had it. Records, 2nd hand fishing gear, Instruments abundant.

Like you I remember with fondness Hoe St Station and the old tea stand. There used to be railing all along the street right down to the wood yard. I would slide down the small, but quite steep embankment at the sound of a steam train coming and run hurriedly to the double green doors of the station entrance. The noisy giant would be bellowing steam and smoke and I'd stand there in awe as it slowly came to a halt. In those days you could buy a platform ticket for a penny and stand there all day and watch the trains thunder in and out of the station.

Selborne Park, with then, a fancy restaurant. The small park with the pensioners playing drafts. They would wheel there long poles with small bent hooks on the end, across the coloured tiles that made up the board.

Lloyd's Park with the small goldfish fountain at the entrance The rose garden behind the William Morris Gallery and the tea hut further down that never seemed to be open.

Blackhorse Road was my favourite station. It meant that we would be going to Southend for the day. Sometimes my dad would get off at Westcliffe, so he could walk along the shoreline and consume lots of whelks and cockles from the Osborne family. They seemed to have total monopoly of seafood stalls in the area. My grandma's caravan in Shoeburyness was my castle. From there I could venture to the breakwater at low tide to catch small crabs with mussel's tied to a piece of string. I could see the remains of the old Mulberry Harbour and the huge smokestack with a burning flame on the horizon. My mum always told me that we only had to worry if the flame ever went out!

As a kid, Walthamstow was an adventure playground. The Rising Sun pond that trained young sailors in the art of paddle boating. The big teahouse on the other side of the Woodford Road, where, for tuppence, you could get a cup of tea and a Bakewell tart. Higham Park Lake, the Hollow Ponds where some of our fishing venues. But it was the River Lea where we learnt the art of fishing. In between the giant Clydesdale horse that pulled the wood laden barges up and down the river, we learnt the art of catching roach, perch and the greedy gudgeon. The bleak were the hard ones to catch, and when you did, they died. Many a time I would venture home with my NHS dried milk tin full of small fish only to watch them die in hours. I always thought that my sister had killed them, she hated fish in her bath.

The River Lea had other fascinations. The old paint factory where we would rumple through the rubbish for discarded paint blocks. The Britain's factory, where we'd hope to find a soldier or two, maybe a Horse Guard for our collection. If their heads were broken, it didn't matter, we had plenty of match sticks to bring them back to life. There was a small wood yard close by and we'd always ask the man for old wood to make our paddle boats.

Now our paddle boats were something else. After the completion of these craft, it was off to the Walthamstow Town Hall for their maiden voyage. When the fountain wasn't working, things would normally go O.K. When the fountain was working, it had strange magnetic attraction to pull our paddle the inner circle of the fountain and hold our paddle boats hostage for hours. The only way we could retrieve them was to wade out to the middle of the fountain (when the "Parky" wasn't looking) and bring them home to port, and ourselves soaking wet.

Sometimes, we got caught and the "Parky" would confiscate our hand-built treasures. I remember once, I was testing my brand new Jetex model of Sir Donald Campbell's "Bluebird". It conked out in the middle of the pond. Distraught, I ran to the "Parky" and told him my tale of woe. "It's not even mine" I told him, "It's my brother's and he'll kill me if he finds out I'm playing with his new toy". For once the "Parky" was sympathetic and told me to wade in and get. He gave me a stern lecture about using other people's property with their permission. "Don't let me see you around here again" was his final words.

Summers were good in Walthamstow. We could go to the Kingfisher pool in Woodford. Larkwood Pool in Chingford. I always hated going through the freezing cold water shower prior to entering the pool. It was always worth it. The girls were always better at Larkwood.

How many times did you ride your bike down Folly Lane like a bat out of hell? As kids, we were told that the Gypsies would kidnap us and eat us. And if they wasn't hungry, they'd put a spell on us and turn us in cats or dogs.

When I was old enough to get a "real job", I found myself working at Notons the suitcase factory in Blackhorse Rd. Didn't last long. Mr. Frost the supervisor was a real bully. I hated him, he hated me. Mr. Frost felt that in the interest of maintaining the quality of Notons suitcases, I should get my bike clips on.

I moved further down the road to Achilles Serre, to learn all about dry cleaning and Hoffman pressing. I was there quite a long time and enjoyed working for them. They became a dying breed, as most of the dry cleaning was being done by "Unit Shops." Soon after I left, they closed their doors for ever. I never got back to Mr. Frost to tell him how much power I had acquired since leaving Notons.

We moved to Upper Walthamstow Road, off of Wood St. Somehow my parent were doing better. I loved it up there. To be near the forest, and as I got older, The Rising Sun pub (run by Dave & Jan Paxton. I'm trying to locate their whereabouts). The Duke's Head down the road and the curry place next door. Had a savings account in the Post Office in Wood Street.

As I grew up in Upper Walthamstow Road, I fell in love with the following. Pamela (Sam) Aldous of Ardleigh Terrace. Wendy Pallant of Chingford Road. Wendy Roberts Miller of Woodford and last but not least, Valerie Kirk of Greenway Ave. God I miss that girl. Friends I have not seen for thirty years are Andrew Paylin. School teacher brothers Derek and Peter Smith. Roger Guinbault. John Webb, Steve Wilkinson, Dave & Jan Paxton, Alan Ashton. God I miss these people and think about them often. When my parents died, my girlfriend (now wife) and I moved to Harlow. We lived there for about five years and then moved to Newmarket. We moved to Canada in 1980.

Walthamstow will always have my fondest memories. They just never go away. Thanking you for allowing me to share them.

Please feel free to share these happy memories of mine to anybody of interest.

Kind Regards Les (Real name Raymond) Cole. Calgary. Canada. 14th Aug 2001.

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