

June 2004 **2 Early years**

I was born on the 7th of November, 1935. I was christened Arthur Day, but afterwards my family thought that they liked 'Colin', so I became Arthur Colin Day, but always called Colin.

We lived in the Yorkshire city of Leeds, in the suburb of Burley, in a back-to-back house in Autumn Street. For those not familiar with the term, a back-to-back house opens straight on to the street, with no yard or garden, and its rooms only go back half way, so that the house in the street behind is 'back-to-back' with it. Usually the terraces are broken every three or four houses, the gap being filled with outside toilets and 'middens' where the dustbins stand.

Undoubtedly we were poor. My father was successively a tram driver, a bus conductor and a bus driver. My older siblings were Marjorie, Frank and Ethel. Marjorie was 16 years older than me, and Ethel 10 years, so I grew up almost as an only child. We would visit Grandma and Grandad Cornforth, who lived with Aunt Annie in 15 Garfield Grove, Armley.

Grandad could be stern with others, but I was a favourite with him. He would take me to the pictures with him in an afternoon. I remember one afternoon he was having a sleep beside the fire. Whilst he slept I took all the empty tins I used to play with, flat tobacco tins and so on, and covered him with them. Then Grandma suddenly announced that the vicar was calling, and you should have heard the noise!

I had a little friend called Alan. Out of the snapshots of memories which are all that remains of one's earliest years, I do remember one incident. I was sitting in my high chair, playing with some dolly mixtures on the tray. Alan came in and stood beside the chair. One by one I stuffed all the sweets into the mouth of the not unwilling Alan until he was unable to speak.

Dad could drive, though we didn't have a car of our own, of course. Sometimes he would borrow a car and take us out. He was a witness to a traffic accident, and had to give testimony at Harrogate Court. He took Alan and me along for the ride, and left us outside in the car. We thought it would be fun to stick our hands out of the car window, holding up the cars behind. When Dad emerged, he was embarrassed to have a traffic jam to deal with.

We moved from Autumn Street to a 'through' house - the name Edwin Road comes to mind. This had a few feet between the front door and the garden wall. At the back there were steps down to a paved yard with an outside toilet, then a wall and a couple of steps down to the sloping street at the back.

Aunt Annie was going out with Geoff Pape, who had a tea delivery round for his family firm, Unique Tea. He would visit us regularly, leaving his van in the back street. At such times I would enjoy sitting in the driving seat and pretending to drive. Though I was only three, I had watched Dad, and knew what some of the controls did. On one occasion I thought it would be fun to release the handbrake, let the van roll down a few yards, then put the brake on again. However, once the handbrake was off, both hands were needed for steering the wretched thing, and I had no hand to spare for the brake.

Ethel had been to the outside toilet. Returning to the house, she asked Geoff, 'Where's your van gone?' At this Mam fainted, whilst Geoff and others tore down the street.

The van had picked up speed steadily as it went down the back street. At the bottom was a main road. Fortunately, nothing was coming along it at the time. Immediately opposite the street there was a wooden shop with the shopkeeper at the door. To the left of the shop was a gap giving access to waste ground beyond. I steered through the gap, and had to turn the van right round to run up a pile of logs, which, as I thought, would stop it safely. Afterwards Mam reprimanded the poor shopkeeper for not doing anything. His indignant

reply was that if she had seen a child my age steering a van like that, she would not have been able to do anything either.

It was agreed that no family member would tell Dad what had happened, as he could get very angry. Nobody seemed to have cautioned Grandad, however. When Dad next visited Garfield Grove, Grandad said to him, 'So we have another driver in the family!'

When war broke out, Dad joined up, though he didn't need to. Eventually other members of the family left home, as Frank joined up, Ethel joined the Land Army and was sent to Somerset, and Marjorie was spending much of her time in St. Ives, Huntingdonshire. It was decided that it would be best for Mam to be near her mother, so we moved to 13 Garfield Grove, Armley, a back-to-back house.

Whilst we were getting the new house ready we stayed with Uncle Frank and Aunt Emma in Pickering Street, just the other side of Armley Road. Whilst we were there, Aunt Emma had a baby girl, Margaret. She was a 'blue baby', and did not survive long. I remember Uncle Frank coming in to my room whilst I was still in bed and telling me that Margaret had gone to be with Jesus.

Redecorating was quite a task. The previous tenants had never stripped one layer of wallpaper before putting on another. It all had to come off. In those days wallpaper had a white strip on both sides, so I was given the task of cutting one side flush with the pattern. Uncle Frank had the useful skill of being able to paint a door with two successive shades of varnish, then drawing a spiral with the handle of a paint brush, cutting through one layer and leaving it looking like the end grain of a log. Very artistic.

Garfield Grove was quite a come-down after Edwin Road. We had to share one of the outside toilets with the people next door, who were not of the cleanest habits. Armley Road, at the bottom of the street, contained several munition factories which were targeted by German bombers. I remember a night spent under the dining table, Mam having me on one arm and Grandma on the other.

The infants' school I went to was a church school, right by the side of St. Bartholomews with its towering steeple. Looking up, when a brisk wind was driving the clouds past, you could imagine that the steeple was about to fall on you. Sharing these thoughts with another boy made him burst into tears. What made me cry was arithmetic. When we were herded into the part of the large classroom reserved for arithmetic, one boy said to a girl, 'We like this, don't we?' I considered them cruel.

The junior school also belonged to St. Bartholomew's, but was boys only and on another site. At this time I developed a liking for model-making. I made cars, lorries, carts, coaches etc. from cardboard. The wheels I considered too difficult, so I omitted them. Later I carved boats from pieces of firewood.

I regret to say that I was not always kind to others. In our playground we had a static water tank. These tanks were erected all over the place during the war. The idea was that there was a ready supply of water at hand in case of fires. I told another boy that there was a bomb in ours, and made him cry.

This was a poor area, and many of the boys came from poor homes. I remember one boy insisting that the thing on top of a house was a 'chimbley', and getting quite cross with me because I had a different opinion.

One boy was dirty, badly-dressed and often came late. Now I realise he must have come from quite a deprived home. He was rather a bully. I was frightened of him. One day when he was rather aggressive, I dotted him one on the nose, and the blood ran. He went in crying to the teacher. I never heard any more about it.

Our headmaster was a churchwarden and a good teacher. When it was time for art, he would set up his own easel at the front of the class and draw a picture with crayons whilst we drew ours. We would gasp at the woodland scenes he created. We enjoyed the times for

singing. At Christmas time he would halt us during 'We three kings' and tell us off for 'galloping'. I never understood what 'galloping' was (except for horses).

Some of us went to West Leeds High School for the eleven-plus exam. Several weeks after, the headmaster got the results. We were all assembled, and he read out the names of a large number of boys. There were three of us whose names were not read out. We kept fixed smiles on our faces, wondering how we had come to fail the exam. Then the head told those whose names had not been read out to come to the front. 'These boys,' he said, 'have won a scholarship.' The others had to return for another try. We were allowed to go home in the middle of the day to tell our parents. I ran all the way. My feet hardly touched the ground. When I arrived, Mam was making bread, up to her elbows in dough. She was pleased, but she couldn't do anything about it.