

Bobby Bell's DGEng BUGLE

FROM MINER TO MAJOR

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PREFACE

Interesting as I think you might have found it, I have foregone the format of describing my engineering career and decided on a bit of light hearted self derision. This little tale is a comic parody of my life written, unbeknownst to me, by my best friend. Its content is based in truth, with a touch of literary licence, apart from a couple of aspects. The aspect of me fathering a child at 10 years old! This is a devise of the Author for in conclusion, implying he is my long lost son. Also, yes my Dad was a hard working miner, but he was a fine intelligent man, respected by all who knew him. He was not an uncouth sop! Colin has pieced together bits of stories I have told him. With a vivid imagination he manages to portray an atmosphere and a time which is very authentic to me.

Everything in Castle End was grey, the silhouette of the pit wheel against the dark rainy sky, the slag heaps that surrounded the village and the people who'd spent their entire lives living amongst this



depressing backdrop. Bobby Bell was a tall scruffy ten year old boy, born to a long line of Durham miners; he played alone but enjoyed his meagre existence. 'Are yee gunna school the dayuh young Bobby?' Bobby's Mother was once an attractive woman whose good looks were weathered from years of living a deprived existence in a northern pit village. 'Ne Mutha, ahm gannin doon the pit just laik me Fatha.' his hands were thrust deep inside the pockets of his short trousers and he was looking down at the stone he was shuffling about with his clog. His Mother wanted more for her son than years in the pit, ending his life in poverty with emphysema or worse. 'Divvent be silly Bobby, yee will gan furtha wi a canny good education than yee waad working doon the pit.' she smiled affectionately, brushed the shoulders of his blazer with her hands, turned him around and gave a gentle shove in the direction of the school. Miss Hilda Clifton, a prim spinster from Cambridge, had been Head Teacher at Castle End School for two years. She was a fierce looking woman with her hair pulled tightly back into a bun, her thick tweed suit made her look twice her stout size and her heavy brogue shoes were a match for any miner's boot. She was standing in the school playground, arms crossed and feet spread wide, awaiting the arrival of the latecomers when Bobby strolled through the Victorian wrought iron gates 'And what time do we call this young Robert?' she asked rather sternly. 'Ah divvent knaa, Ah dee not aan a watch as Aa've te come te school instead of earning a living doon the pit.' he smirked at her. Miss Clifton was only just beginning to understand the local dialect, but young Bobby's broad brogue remained a mystery to her. 'Hurry along to class; it's your favourite subject.' Bobby's eyes lit up, 'Yee divvent mean French dyer?' Miss Clifton's hard expression melted as she had a soft spot for young Bobby,



she smiled as she knew that French was the only subject that kept Bobby at school and even with his schoolboy attempts at the language, it was easier to understand than Geordie. After school young Bobby would run

straight home, his northern clogs would rattle on the cobbles like a Bren gun. His haste was not caused by his eagerness to see his parents but to avoid another beating from the school bullies who persecuted him.

His interests in all things French extended to him wearing a beret, long scarf and spectacles that perched on the end of his nose to give him an air of sophistication, hence the bullying. The village of Castle End consisted of three streets of terraced houses, each with two bedrooms upstairs, a kitchen and parlour downstairs and a small back yard where stood the WC or 'Nettie'. There were two pubs, The Feathers, this was where the men folk drank hard and fast and fighting was common place and The Belmont Arms, where you could take the wife or girlfriend for a Babycham or Snowball. There were two chapels, a grocer's shop, the village school and The Castle End Working Men's Club. Bobbie ran up the street towards his house, he pulled down on the handle of the distressed black door and leaned his bodyweight against it, forcing it to open suddenly into the dimly lit parlour and almost falling onto the threadbare rug that only half covered the floor. His Father, a man old before his time from hard work and even harder drinking, was sitting on the only chair in the room by a dusty old stove; his skin was black from ingrained coal dust that had also coloured his ample moustache. 'Whoa noo Bobby, you'll hev the door off its hinges if yee are not canny.' Bobby's Father was embarrassed about his son's choice of clothing; it should be flat cap and neckerchief. 'Ahm not surprised tha yee are running, walking around dressed laik a poofter.' 'Leave the lad Alain Daddy, education broadens the mind.' Mrs. Bell was more worldly wise and more understanding than her husband. 'Noo Bobby, what hev yee been learning at school the dayuh?' 'Aa've got summat important te tel yee,' Bobby said as he tugged the beret from his head, 'Yee had betta sit doon.' His Mother looked at the only chair that was currently occupied by her husband, 'Get on wi it lad,' she demanded. 'Aa've got a lass up the duff.' Bobbie just blurted it out, his Father stood from the chair and his Mother fell into it. 'But yee are ernly ten,' she gasped. 'Whee is the lass, dee wi knaa hor?' Bobbie's Father being a simple miner, failed to grasp the gravity of the situation. 'Ne Fatha, sheh comes frem doon sooth.' Bobby appeared to be proud of his accomplishment. 'She's heor on hor holidays.' Bobby's Father thought for a moment then asked 'Hoo aad is this young lass?' 'Sheh will be 28 next birthday.' Bobby replied. '28, she's nearly as aad as me.' His Mother looked at her husband 'What are wi gunna dee Daddy?' Mr Bell rounded on Bobby

‘Whats this lasses nyame?’ Bobby thought for a moment then said ‘Sheh sez tha hor nyame wez Ruth Willison.’ ‘Is sheh still heor?’ Mr Bell could sense Bobby’s fear at this interrogation. ‘Ne Fatha, sheh returned te Luton.’ Again Mrs Bell looked to her husband for support and answers ‘What will the neighbours syah Daddy?’ Mr Bell circled the floor deep in thought then raised one of his long bony fingers, a Bell physical trait, ‘There’s nothin fre it, wi will hev te move, Aa’ve been offered a job as caretaker at a school in Kent, wi will gan tomorrow.’ The very next day they gathered their belongings, what few there were, and caught the 11.15 to London. Bobby wore his beret and scarf for the journey as his Mother told him that Kent was close to France and he thought that this might be a good opportunity to try out his French language.

A car picked them up from the station and drove them to Berkley Manor Private School, for privileged young men. It was an old building of red brick that resembled something from a Dracula film. Young men in fine clothes wandered the manicured grounds; Bobby stared as his hand grasped his scarf, ‘Ah think ahm gunna laik it heor.’ he thought. ‘Will Ah be able te continue me French studies heor Fatha?’ ‘Yee winnit be mixing wi these fine gentlemen Bobby, yee will be gunna the school in the toon.’



Bobby’s heart sank as he had only known the village school at Castle End and pictured the new school to be the same. The next day Mrs Bell walked Bobby into town to meet with the Headmaster of his new school. This building was brand new, spread over

three floors with large windows, Bobby’s mouth hung open as his gaze ascended from the ground floor to the roof, he had never seen such a thing. They walked through the double glass doors that led to the reception area. A young lady sat at a desk with a folder opened in front of her. ‘Good Morning, we have an appointment with Mr Jenkins for ten thirty.’ Mrs Bell attempted to speak so as to be understood as she pulled Bobby’s beret from his head. The lady at the desk perused the folder then said ‘Certainly Mrs Bell, please follow me.’ With that she rose from the desk and walked towards a corridor in the far corner of the reception. She stopped by a dark wooden door with a plaque reading ‘HEAD MASTER’; she knocked on the door and waited. ‘Come.’ a voice beckoned from the other side. The receptionist turned the handle and led Mrs Brown and Bobby inside. ‘Your 10.30 appointment Mr Jenkins.’ ‘Thank you Miss Smallbottom.’ He gestured for the Bell’s to be seated. ‘I understand that Bobby will be joining us next week Mrs Bell.’ then turning his attention to Bobby he asked ‘why don’t you tell me a little about yourself then young man.’ Bobby looked at his Mother for support; she mouthed encouragement and nodded in the Headmaster’s direction. ‘Well, Ah laik French, Ah taak it whenever Ah can an Ah also wear some traditional French clothing as yee can see frem me beret an scarf.’ his broad Geordie accent left Mr Jenkins a little bewildered but Mrs Bell sat beaming with pride for her offspring. ‘Well I can

tell from your attire that you like the French, we have a first class French teacher here, and we also have a wonderful English department that I think you will benefit from immensely.’ he then went on to add ‘I also think that woodwork would be a beneficial practical subject, I can see from your long fingers that you could be artistic.’ Bobby and his Mother left the school and he was surprisingly optimistic, this new school would map out his whole future. As for Ruth Willison, he never heard from her again but his mind would often drift with thoughts of the child he never knew. Many years passed and Bobby became Bob, he worked as an apprentice engineer, later securing a good job with the Ministry Of Defence. Whilst working away he stayed in digs run by a woman and her young daughter, Mary. After a whirlwind romance they married and went on to have three wonderful children. His many years working for the Ministry Of Defence secured a good pension and life was very comfortable.



Now living in retirement in the Bedfordshire village of Wootton, he was still interested in

everything French and his broad Geordie accent had all but disappeared, to be replaced by an educated upper class gentleman’s grammar, which had earned him the nickname of ‘The Major’.

The woodworking classes had influenced his choice of hobbies, when his children were young he could often be seen in his shed whittling toys, and he had also become something of an inventor and had constructed things like a travelling toilet for campers, a vacuum cleaner with a built in radio, for the busy housewife and a slow cooker made from an old kettle, this wasn’t too successful.

Every day at twelve o clock he would wander across the field to the local village pub where he would spend hours entertaining his friends with tales of his days ‘up north’, he never forgot them. Then one day, a middle aged man came into the pub for a drink. He had recently moved to the village with his wife but was yet to make friends with the locals. Bob, being an amiable chap invited the new resident, Colin, to join him and his friends at their table. They all got along famously, and Bob soon found that, despite their eleven year age difference, he and Colin were very much alike, even his wife Mary agreed. Bob soon learnt that Colin’s surname was Willison, that he originated from Luton and that he had never known his Father, could this be? As Colin’s Mother had recently passed away and no records of his birth existed, Bob had decided that the two men would just remain good friends and continue to discover how alike they really were.

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