

RESPECT

Chapter Two

“We don’t want him. You have him”

Richard Hill

As planned, we were moved by Mr. Andrews in his bigger cattle truck; not just the cattle but on other trips, all the household furnishings as well as the dairy equipment. Very hygienic!

This was a much bigger farm, 110 acres situated about a mile from the village of Llandinam. Although only fourteen miles from the Welsh speaking village we had come from, this was a predominantly English-speaking village.

The farm was called Middlegwerneirin Farm situated in the shadow of an ancient native hill-fort, Cefn Carnedd, between the Upper and Lower ‘Gwerneirin’ Farms.

The farmhouse itself, I later learned, had been rebuilt in a Gothic style as an estate farm of the Dinam Estate during the late 19th-century.

The farm was approached by a straight gravel lane about 200 metres in length. On the right was the impressive house and ahead and to the left were the farm buildings.

This was a new ‘home’ for our cattle and was a nervous time for them. New fields, new pens, new cowsheds. The first milking at the new place was late evening due to the time the move had taken. But they gave very little milk due to their anxiety. The first night they were kept in the cowshed rather than being let out into the fields to help them to climatise. The following morning, somewhat more relaxed, they gave more milk.

Dad must have arranged for the milk to be collected by C.D.N. (Central Dairies Newtown). After milking, each cows’ milk was carried in a stainless-steel bucket back to the dairy where it was poured into a cooler from where it ran into a churn. Milk comes out of the cows at around 38.6 degrees Celsius and has to be cooled as quickly as possible to just above 2 degrees Celsius. When full, each churn contains

11 gallons of milk. Ours was rich Channel Island milk. At the end of milking the churns had their lids fitted and each was labelled to identify the farm and farmer. After morning milking, Dad took them by tractor and trailer to the milk stand which stood, at the end of the lane, by the road. The milk stand was approximately the same height as the bed of the milk lorry which meant that Dad had to do all the heavy lifting of the full churns up onto the milk stand. From here, later in the morning, it would be collected by the milk lorry and empty churns deposited.

The farm buildings and environs were great places to explore. One of the first things I discovered was a pump house where water would be pumped from the well in the courtyard up to a 2000-gallon tank in the fields behind the house. From here it would be gravity fed down to the house and buildings. It also fed some of the drinking troughs for the cattle in the fields.

This move meant a new school for me. For one term, until I moved up to Llanidloes High School I attended Llandinam Primary School. Surprisingly, after moving only a few miles from the all-Welsh village of Bont, this area was, in the main, all English.

The schoolmaster's name was Mr. Stephens whose son Graham also attended the school. The highlight of the week was going into Mr. Stephens' home to watch school programmes on his television.

Back at the farm, I had a number of tasks to carry out to earn pocket money. Every Saturday, I would have to carry around six buckets of hot water from the kitchen to the dairy. We found a Dutch style of 'yolk' which I could carry two buckets at a time despite hot water sloshing down my wellies.

These were big cowsheds compared to the one at Bontdolgadfan. There were three of them. They had a traditional layout. The division between stalls were called '*Boskins*' and the gully that collected the manure behind the cows was called the '*Groop*'. The passageway in front of the cows, where the food and fodder were kept was called the '*Bing*'.

My least favourite job on a Saturday was 'mucking out' the cowsheds. Manure in the 'groop', the gully behind the cows, had to be shovelled by hand into a wheelbarrow which was wheeled out, across the yard, and deposited on the 'muck heap'. This would later be spread on the fields to be used as a form of fertilizer.

Another Saturday task was to collect the groceries my Mum had ordered from a house about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away. I converted an old pram into a form of truck to make the task easier.

Also, on the new task list was to mow the lawn. We hadn't had a lawn at Bont so mowing this started as a novelty, but soon became a chore. In front of the house was a flat lawn, the size of a tennis court. At the side of the house was a similar but slightly uneven lawn with a Monkey Puzzle tree in the centre. Dad had bought a second-hand mower from a market. It was great when it was going. When it was

going. It was a nightmare to start and once it did, it spluttered and frequently cut out. Later, Dad realised the trouble it caused me and invested in a new mower which made the job much easier - though it was never a pleasure.

As my pocket money gathered, I had nearly saved enough for what I really wanted - a camera. I'd been interested in photography since when I can remember but occasionally was allowed to use Mum and Dad's camera - an old 'box-brownie'. A new camera offer was advertised on a packet of breakfast cereal. I needed to collect a number of tokens and a financial fee. I ate cereals like I never had before until I had collected the required number of tokens. I sent these, along with a postal order, as early as possible and waited 4 - 6 weeks for the camera to arrive. After about three weeks, I began going to meet the postman every morning. I would sit on the milk stand at the end of the lane in anticipation to catch the postman. Rain or shine I would be there to the delight of the postman as it meant he didn't have to drive down to the house. But the camera never arrived. One day, I received a letter from the promoter apologising for the delay, explaining it had sold out, and offering an alternative camera or my money back. I opted for a camera and began the wait again. Eventually a package arrived. I opened it eagerly but carefully to reveal the camera, a Coromatic 50. It was a great camera and I took loads of photographs, gradually improving with time. The only issue was of course, the cost of processing into prints. The film cartridge would be sent off for processing, with a payment postal order and the prints and negatives would arrive a few days later.

Not long after moving into Middlegwerneirin, we had a television installed. Unlike the 'cable' service in Bont, we had to have our own aerial installed. Because we were on the side of a hill, the aerial had to be mounted on a high pole attached to one of the high chimneys. But the reception was appalling. The picture kept rolling and breaking-up. So, the solution proposed by the television rental company was to fit a signal booster. Although the reception was better, it was never very good. And we only had one channel, BBC.

Here again there was a big construction project being undertaken. A water abstraction well was bored through sand and gravels in the grounds of Lowergwerneirin Farm, near the River Severn to take water from the underlying aquifer. Built above ground was the Llandinam Water Treatment Works (as it became known) which is the sole source of water for approximately 52,000 customers in mid-Wales. The project was built by the Montgomeryshire Water Board (Now managed by Severn Trent Water) and was designed to ensure that the water supply in mid-Wales is 'Always On and Good to Drink'. The way this impacted us at Middle Gwerneirin was that two large water pipes were buried beneath our land and a big concrete enclosed reservoir, built to contain approximately 9 million litres of water, into the side of Cefn Carnedd, the hill behind our house. The feed and return pipes were large cast iron pipes some 0.5 metre in diameter and where they traversed over the crown of the hill, their joints were encased in large concrete structures to prevent them bursting apart. During construction there was a hillside

drainage and stability problem. Spoil excavated from the hill, large enough for installation of the reservoir tank, was deposited on the hillside. This caused a slow moving 'landslide' of soil and debris moving down the hill on the edge of a wood. It took with it a number of mature trees as well as topsoil and other debris.

Old lorry tyres were used as 'cushioning' when these large sections of water pipe were offloaded from their transport lorries. These tyres were left along the route of the pipeline near the top of the hill. One Sunday evening, while Dad and Mum were milking, I was passing the back of the house when one of these large tyres bounced over the hedge, into our courtyard and slammed into the inside of the open courtyard wall, missing me by no more than 10 metres. I went and told Dad who came round and examined the wall and found it had been pushed out a few centimetres. He looked up at the hill to see if he could see anyone, but could not see anyone. He then decided to call the police who arrived some time later. They looked at the damaged wall and the lorry tyre now laying in our courtyard. He suggested that it may have been the work of local youngsters who had rolled the tyre down the hill. Amazingly it had bounced over every hedge on the way down, causing no damage until it hit the courtyard wall. The police drove up the back road to the construction site on the hill but came across no one. They could take no further action.

Another time we needed to call the police was bizarre. My cousin Eve, her then husband Clive and their young son Anthony were staying on holiday with us. One afternoon, Clive, Anthony and I went down to the River Severn near Lowergwerneirin. Clive went wading in the river in his wellies looking for I know not what. He found a shiny ring attached to something and when he wiped away the sand and gravel, he revealed a few centimetres of something. A metal ring was attached to a convex dome of this object. He suspected it was a grenade or something similar. We went home and reported our finding to Dad who took us down in the car to have another look. Dad suspected it was a wartime bomb and we went home and he reported it to the police. We went back down to the river and waited for the police who arrived a short time later with his blue light flashing, indicating he thought it was an emergency, or at the very least, urgent. Dad went into the river and offered to show the policeman the device which was a few metres out. "I'm not coming anywhere near that." said the police officer, "It may well be a wartime bomb. I hear a few were jettisoned during the war around here." He thought it would be best to call out the nearest bomb disposal team. He called his headquarters on his radio to arrange this. When he got back to us he said they'd be coming the following morning and added: "If anyone asks you why the police were here, tell them there's a dead cow in the river". When we went for a walk down there later in the evening, the police had erected a small sign stating '*DANGER – UNEXPLODED BOMB – KEEP CLEAR!*'. So, this was the dead cow?! We went down to the river the following morning and the bomb disposal team were already in action. We were told to watch from a distance away and eventually they blew it up. Not a very big explosion and a bit disappointing!

During the summer holidays, between primary and high schools, I used to go on holidays with relatives in Staffordshire. One such holiday was in a place called Yarlet with my Uncle and Aunt, Bernard and Pat Wiseman. They had three children: Christopher who was older than me, Alison, younger than me and Peter, who was exactly the same age as me, to the day. Uncle Bernard had a collection of old inactive cars, languishing amongst the nettles in the corner of a field. These were our playground, each taking turns to pretend to drive. We built dens out of straw bales for walls and old corrugated sheets as a roof, covered in more bales. By night, we were allowed to sleep inside, all four of us. One year, Chris both amused and alarmed us in equal measure with his torch that had coloured filters. He pointed out a star that seemed to 'twinkle' with different colours. He convinced us that there was someone on that star with an identical torch flashing messages back to us. We believed him and spent a sleepless night worrying about it. What did Chris know that we didn't?

Back at our farm, I spent a lot of time on my own. Mum and Dad were always busy in one way or another. I had to invent my own play activities. These were many and varied. I built a dam in the stream at the foot of the garden. It took me days to get it right and it kept washing away. But eventually held, and held back the stream to a depth of around a couple of feet or so. I tried a 'boat', a disused tin bath but fell in and got absolutely soaked.

After Llandinam Primary School, I graduated to Llanidloes High School, some six miles away. To get to school, I and other local children were driven to Llandinam where we joined all the other children waiting for the coach to the high school. Some, older, were already pupils at the high school, but a few of us, first-timers, didn't know what to expect. I suppose I should have looked upon it as an adventure, but I was scared - really scared. Thankfully there was one boy, the same age as me who I'd got to know at Llandinam primary who was starting out at high school himself. I'd got to know Wally (William Stephens) quite well, so it was somewhat of a relief to have him alongside. I have remained friends with Wally, on and off for over 50 years. Back on the coach, I was still pretty worried about what lay in wait. When we arrived, we were guided into a big hall, full of children. We were ushered into seats at the front of the hall. Thankfully, I got to sit next to Wally and waited for whatever was to come. After a short while, the teachers assembled on the stage.

One, a fearful looking man with longish white hair and dressed in a torn black gown, Mr Thomas, came to the front of the stage and told us to stand. Down the aisle from behind us, came a bald headed man in a black gown flowing behind him. He was the headmaster, Mr Harris, who was nicknamed 'Froggie'. He climbed the steps onto the stage, turned around and told us to be seated. I can't remember much of what happened next until the names of the new pupils were read out. Although I didn't realise it at the time, our names were being read out and we were given the class or stream we would be in. I was assigned class 1b and Wally 1c. This meant that we wouldn't be in the same class, which disappointed me greatly. There were however a

small number of Llandinam children who were also assigned 1b, so at least I'd know some of my classmates. They included Terry Andrews, the boy who had lived at Middlegwerneirin before us. I knew him a little better than the others so I tagged along with him. The other details we were assigned were our 'houses', which at the time I didn't understand at all. I was assigned to 'Ceiriog', and later discovered that the school was divided into 3 houses for the purposes of sports competitions and eisteddfods et al.

Time at school wasn't happy. I was badly bullied, especially at break times. I won't name names as some of them are now much older and repentant and have recently been in touch via social media. The worst incident was when a group of boys dragged me into a wooded area of the grounds and one urinated on me.

I found some of the subjects engaging, but others not so. I liked, and was good at, physics and technical drawing amongst others. I tried to be good at woodwork, metalwork, maths, english etc. but failed. I intensely disliked history and biology et al.

I was a complete failure at, and disliked, sport, especially football. When it came to the captains choosing players for their respective teams, I was always the last one left with one captain saying to the other "We don't want him. You have him!". And whichever team got lumbered with me, they always put me in goal. I'll never forget standing in the goalmouth, freezing my nuts off, and frequently soaked to the skin while all the others were far down the field, tackling, and other tactics that footballers use when all of a sudden, this mass of twenty or so players would head towards me until one kicked the ball in my direction. Half of these players hoped that I would be able to prevent a ball, roughly 9 inches in diameter, from getting into a goal, 8 foot high by 24 feet wide. As much as I would like to have prevented this from happening, I never could, much to the delight of the other half of the players on the pitch.

In the second year, one of the sports was a cross-country run, or in my case, stroll. I wasn't cut out to be a runner, so why try? Later in my time at the school, in sports, we were given the choice of football or cross-country. I chose the latter, not because I actually preferred it, but because it was the 'lesser of two evils'. Besides, I'd worked out a shortcut, out of sight of the school, so only had to run about a mile, take the shortcut, which involved wading through a river, strolling a while, before running back into school.

Two sports I liked, and quite good at, were the long jump and triple jump. I have long legs which helped me propel myself quite a long way. I would have done quite well at those two events on sports day, but because of my abysmal failure at events such as the high jump and pole jump, I wasn't picked for my house team. I was usually picked to be a steward on sports day.

I still had, the voice 'of an angel' and until my voice broke, continued to win singing competitions at the school eisteddfods. I also sang at the annual school concert. I

once sang a duet with a boy, also called Richard, who sadly, forgot his lines during the piece, but I carried on regardless.

One year, during the summer holidays, a group of us, along with pupils from other schools in the area, were selected to perform 'Gloria', by Antonia Vivaldi. Each day we would be bussed to the concert hall in Newtown, to rehearse with an orchestra which consisted of schoolchildren musicians from schools in the county. On the night of the performance, we played to an audience of around 500 people, my parents included. However, not long after, my voice broke, and was never replaced as a tenor or baritone. However, I did successfully sing in a folk group a few years on, but more of that later.

Another couple of friends I made at Llanidloes High School were brother and sister, Brian and Sandra Griffiths. We shared the mini-bus ride between our homes and Llandinam. Brian was in the year below me and Sandra a year or two above. Their parents, Elwyn and Doreen Griffiths farmed 'Hornby Farm', a half a mile or so from our farm. Mrs Griffiths baked a cake for me, for my Mum's birthday, in 1969. Through that, Mr & Mrs Griffiths became friends with my Mum and Dad and we would have supper together, alternating visits between their farm and ours. Usually on a Saturday evening, we would have supper together, followed by a stroll around each other's farms. One year, a car rally came past. Brian and I went to watch the rally cars go past from the field opposite near a little old house, Ty Bach (Formerly known as Gwerneirin cottage).

A lady called Mrs Jones lived in Ty Bach (Little House). She was a frail but kindly old lady. Each Sunday, mum would make an additional roast dinner which I would take to her over the field, the former lane to the farm. We would invite Mrs Jones to join us for lunch on Christmas day, and I can fondly recall her proudly wearing a paper hat from a cracker. On New Years eve, we would go to Ty Bach to be entertained by Mrs Jones. This was the first time I had alcohol, a small glass of sherry! Mum enjoyed the occasional glass of sherry, but always said, "It's gone straight to my head."

At some point, I was encouraged to join the 'YFC' (Young Farmers Club) in Llandinam. We met weekly at the Village Hall in the centre of the village. A half timbered building, formerly a farmhouse. The YFC is open to young people aged 10 - 28. The only memory I have of all the various activities is 'basket making'. I made a litter bin which Mum treasured up until her passing. I do remember being bullied during the break by HB and PJ, who promised to leave me alone if I gave them cigarettes. From then on, each week, I would steal a packet of my fathers cigarettes from a box in the pantry. During the break at YFC, I would smoke myself and give a few fags to the bullies.

One of the 'dens' I had was an attic room at the back of the house. One year I had a chemistry set for Christmas, and set up a laboratory in the attic. I can't remember

what concoctions I created, but one gave off the most horrendous stink. I had a book on making and creating various electrical and electronic devices. One was a simple crystal radio which I made out of parts from old broken televisions and radios I had, but it never worked. It involved making a simple aerial which I made by stretching a wire, from an electric fence, from the attic window to a tree some 100 feet away. Sometime later my cousin Steve's grandfather, Mr Pullan, came to stay. He had been an electrical engineer during a long career in the industry. He was very interested in my attempt at building a simple radio receiver and came up to the attic to cast his eye over it. He saw a flaw in the tuning coil and rewound it. Then, when we connected it to the aerial and tuned it, lo and behold, it came to life and received an overseas radio station. It worked for a few minutes, but never did again!

The years went by, and my education went on. I did particularly well at physics and one year got 99.9% in the exam. And the time came to consider career choices. Because of my ongoing love of photography and 'behind the scenes' of television, my ambition became a desire to become a cameraman for the BBC. But when I told the careers adviser of my ambition he implied that it wasn't a realistic choice. Thinking back I feel it was the duty of a careers adviser to find out what the requirements were to become a trainee cameraman. But he didn't. Instead he asked me what my next choice would be? From a young boy I'd had some experience of watching electricians at work, installing cabling, lights, switches and sockets. This was my second choice. He said that I might be able to get an apprenticeship with the local electricity board, but not much else. So, I decided to try on my own.

This is where it gets complicated! My cousin Dennis's first wife Muriel's father was an officer with the Department of the Environment in Cardiff. He oversaw the work of the DOE (formerly MPBW) which looked after all the services of government establishments. He found out that there were vacancies for apprentice electricians with the DOE at RAF Sealand, near Chester, and RAF Valley, on the island of Anglesey. The latter was too difficult to get to by public transport, so I opted for RAF Sealand. In August of 1971, I filled out an application form which was quite complicated. I was required to provide two referees, one from school and one from someone who knew me. The latter reference was provided by Mr. Griffiths, Sandra and Brian's father. I will always be indebted to the late Mr. Griffiths for providing for me, my first ever job reference. A short while later, I was invited to interview at the DOE offices at RAF Sealand. As we drove, Dad, Mum and I, to Sealand, I can remember being extremely nervous. We arrived in plenty of time and when called in, I was faced with an interview panel of three men. They asked me questions about electrical theory, installation and other things. They told me that they bought their electricity 'in bulk' and asked me if I knew what they meant. I didn't. It conjured up images of bulk tankers, full of electricity. A week or so later, I received a letter telling me that I'd been successful. I was thrilled. I was going to be an apprentice electrician and later, all being well, would become a fully qualified electrician. But there was one

'downside'. This job meant leaving home to a place which was totally strange to me. Where I knew nothing or no-one.

A couple of weeks later came the time to leave home. We drove the 63 miles from home to what was going to become my new home. I can say little about getting booked into my accommodation as much of this and what happened during my career on MOD property is covered by the Official Secrets Act which I had to sign. Worry not, plenty happened outside working hours!

Back at RAF Sealand, it was time for Mum and Dad to leave. I waved them off suddenly feeling all alone in a bad, mad world.