

Wendy

When Life Gives You Strawberries
– Memories of a Fenland Boy (III)

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For Wendy (of course)
and all the allowances you made.
With the best of my love, always
Dave

'I admit the efficacy of your tequila – but do you realize that while you're battling against death, or whatever you imagine you're doing, while what is mystical in you is being released, or whatever it is you imagine is being released, while you're enjoying all this, do you realize what extraordinary allowances are being made for you by the world which has to cope with you, yes, are even now being made by *me*?'

Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*

Author's Note and Acknowledgements

This is my third volume of memories chronologically, the second to be published after *The Sunny Side of the House*, which left me aged fifteen in my boyhood East Anglian village of Outwell circa 1970. I am not skirting entirely the turbulence of the intervening years till I enter these pages in my early twenties; *Cambridge* is on the stocks.

I tried to discharge the duty of care to family and friends wherever possible by showing them in advance their mentions. I omitted the odd memory or storyline I know to be true on the principle of sparing upset to others and their own families. I refrained from shedding light on some sensitive matters.

I hope it is clear in the text where I speak from personal experience and where based on the input of others. I have drawn heavily on *Diary*, the great baggy monster growing beside me (better than inside me) since 1969. While its record has the virtue of being contemporary, it cannot tell what it was not told. It has always been ruled by a dictator, I say to dispel any idea of impartiality. Nevertheless, what was written is written. I have not edited *Dave Daze* for content here any more than in the extracts appearing daily on my website. The language is of its time and place.

In thanking all those who have contributed to inform and enrich the text, including again its copyeditor Ivan Butler, I naturally take responsibility for any errors or lapses of taste that could have been avoided in my presentation.

Above all I thank Wendy, whose story is not mine but a huge part of mine. I gave her the chance to read every word of these memories. If not her blessing, she gave me permission to publish them.

All the best, David.

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1

The Elizabethan

Sitting in my shared living room, a month past my twenty-third birthday, I was drinking cider as a loosener for the evening ahead. It was the only drink I had in, a big plastic bottle of it. Cookface came off the street for me and drank a glass, my glass, straight down. He was nervous of his date, with whom he sat in the back seat as Adrian drove us to the formal branch Christmas do.

I hadn't been a cider drinker since I was fifteen or whatever, before the days of pubs. I started on beer when we got to the Elizabethan in the village of Welford. Only a couple of pints, mind; the steak dinner switched me to vodka in numbers.

Any aspirations of pulling one of our pretty office girls – there were a few, to be fair – had been dashed or doused by the end of the evening, for all the shift I had put in on the dancefloor. Still, I had the swagger to approach a girl from another party. She agreed to dance, so perhaps I was not too obviously drunk, if somewhat dishevelled and certainly unshaven. I had a fortnight out of the office coming up to start a holiday-season beard.

The music stopped as we took the floor. She agreed to take a drink from me, a gin and tonic. Embarrassingly, I could not get her one. They had covered the taps. Soon after, we were outside in the car park. Everyone, not just the two of us; not the two of us against the back wall, the custom if you got lucky at Three Holes village hall.

Despite failing on two fronts, I gamely invited her back to Northampton with us. She did not agree to that. She laughed, quick to tell me she had a six-year-old boy to get home to.

Her friend Barb at last persuaded her to give me a Rugby phone number, so they could get out of the cold into their transport and be gone. I was elated

on our own stuttering way home, untroubled by various stops. The Hillman Hunter Adrian would later trade in for an umbrella kept overheating, without any sparks from the back seat. Cookface and Erica had not fallen out, nor fallen into anything. There was time for a few beers back at Gordon Street, courtesy of my housemate Benny.

Dave Daze, as I would christen years later entries in Diary, mentioned for that night of 1 December 1978 only 'a nice looking Wendy'. Cookface was struck by my exact, bolder words in the car: 'I'm going to marry that girl.'

2

Summer Daze 1978

‘Let me quote from the doctor’s report. “It is difficult to judge of intemperance when the applicant comes in with his breath smelling of alcohol.”’

Frank Shipton, Staffing Manager of Royal Insurance’s Overseas Department, seemed to expect some input from me. I resisted the temptation to say I didn’t see what was difficult about the judgment call. ‘It was nine o’clock on a Saturday morning. I’d done my finals, had confirmation of my degree. Didn’t I pass it then?’ It had never occurred to me to treat a medical exam like an exam.

Although Mr Shipton gave the impression of living up to his Christian name, an open broad face, clean-shaven and short-haired as befitted his fifty-something years, he did not give me a straight answer. ‘The doctor strongly advised you’re not an acceptable risk for life assurance at normal rates.’

It wasn’t even the same doctor who had failed to make me stop drinking in my second year after a bout of hepatitis.

That July 1978 London meeting was not as relaxed as my first visit to 5 Chancery Lane in the spring. Many companies would send graduate recruitment teams around the universities every year on what was known as the milk round. I was studying modern languages. It was the international scope rather than the insurance aspect of Royal that led me to a chat with someone not much older than I was. Phil Dick, part of the Royal UK team, put me through to his Overseas colleagues.

I worried subconsciously or not at all about the 14 March interview in London. Three days without a pint accounted for the ten on its eve with Andy Wright, my best friend in Cambridge since our freshman year. In shaking

hands before he sat me down across his empty desk, Mr Shipton might have caught for himself a lack of freshness in my breath, a whiff of stale beer.

On April Fools' Day I received a letter offering me a job with Royal, subject to medical and completing my graduation. I would move to London and Overseas after six months' boot camp at a UK branch.

Dave Daze Monday 24 April 1978: Cambridge

Went Northampton see Royal Office Messrs. Blackburn & Papadopolous or somethin similar. Over 5 hrs. on the bus, a real drag, especially as I didn't really learn much when I got there.

Wrote off confirming acceptance of the job.

'Tavern in the Town' Northampton Good cheap food, cheap beer.

Pubs close there 2 p.m. sorry tale only time 2 pts. 2 later in bar.

I was not best pleased to lose the July day's work at Anglia Cannery, where I made the money to finance the rest of my summer, without knowing what was behind the summons to London until I got there. If Mr Shipton was wondering why he should go to any trouble over someone who had not yet started working for him, he did not show it.

The quack had grudgingly admitted I would qualify as a class-two life risk. Royal consulted my Outwell home GP. I had known Dr Rushmer forever. His son John had got me playing football for Upwell as a schoolboy; apparently the father spoke up for me now. Frank Shipton said he would do his best to override the medical department and get me in, because I had 'impressed everyone so much'. I laughed in my fist and to Diary at that thought. Let the chips fall where they may.

Having nonchalantly confirmed the job was mine on receipt of a letter from Royal a week after my Frank interview, I returned to strawberry picking and pickling. By August I was free to hitchhike to Llangynidr and my proudly Welsh former teachers Ralph (Latin) and Marion (English) Roberts: a few days walking in the Brecon Beacons, drinking moderately with them, playing cards, doing the washing-up with Ralph.

I thumbed back to Winchester, to learn from Andy's parents that he was abroad with Fiona. He had met her in Cambridge at the Queen's Jubilee celebrations of 1977, both brought up in Belfast without knowing each other there. I had more luck hooking up with another mate. Fangs (Kevin Rayner) was the only one to come up with the trifecta of Outwell, grammar school and

Cambridge. I made a bad impression on his girlfriend Jane, without caring. She was not Minnie. I didn't take my Doc Martens off from Wednesday through Friday when, wrecked, I caught a train back to East Anglia.

A dozen of us from the village, including Doey, Stink, Bernie, Aidi, Buzzy and Robbo, an Upwell interloper, stood in the Scoreboard End at Old Trafford for United's season opener against Birmingham. Stevie Metcalfe drove our rental van, which was in a poor state the next morning. Joe Jordan won it for us with the only goal.

Drawing the dole and earning a pittance blackberrying – 5.5p a pound, I struggled to make a fiver a day – I continued the round of holiday visits established during my student years, or schooldays in the case of Uncle Bob and Aunt Grace in Norwich. I spent successive weekends there entering September, the first purely recreational, on the second taking in a Canaries one-all draw with the minor Manchester team. The next day I was at the annual remembrance service of St Faith's crematorium on the Cromer Road with my mum Joyce. Aged fifty and a widow for three years, she came up by the Yarmouth excursion bus. I promised myself this one would be the last such service I would attend. I persuaded myself she would understand and not mind.

Since my father Allen's death in September 1975 Joyce had lived alone with their fat, brown-and-white Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Daman, his name chosen in happier days by my cousin Mandy as a conflation of our two. Mum was still in the council house where I had been brought up: 15 Isle Bridge Road, Outwell, the village where she and her three siblings had been born, like their father George. His wife, Nan Dinah, came originally from Norwich.

Grandad George was nicknamed Daub from his days with the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company. The only time I knew him go to the cinema was in 1972, to see *On the Buses*, a spin-off from the popular television sitcom of the same name. Retired in 1968 from his own forty-five years as a bus driver, and five years later aged seventy from his roadside fruit and vegetable retailing business, he still had the two-acre smallholding around the bungalow, Maillebourne, where he and Dinah had lived all my life.

'We'll find a way, we'll find a way,' Dinah murmured, hugging their sobbing eldest child Joyce to her after Allen's sudden death, a heart attack aged fifty-two. Nan and Grandad had been on holiday in Scotland when it happened. They were the strongest part of a wide support network for Joyce in Outwell: two aunts, an uncle and friends she had known all her life. She

continued to work full-time at the local fruit and vegetable processing and canning factory, Hannam & Davy, as well as for Grandad when occasion demanded and on our own big garden: the size of a league football pitch at the back and a good five-a-side one at the front facing Isle Bridge Road.

Once the working-all-hours part of my last university summer was through, the resumption of my student lifestyle at home did my relationship with Joyce little good. When I was not at work or lying on the settee, I was often getting drunk to the point of alcoholic amnesia. Although I have generally omitted from this work (partly based on an early-draft reader's disgust) the physical indignities of a drunkard – vomiting, incontinence on occasion – Mum was not spared them. After one bedwetting episode, I wrote Diary of thinking about suicide, then in the next sentence of switching from beer to shorts. I went on to express pity of Mum for worrying about me, then confidence that all would be well once I got a girl again.

Apart from bottling my feelings in volumes of Diary, I was still decanting my personal history into what I hoped would pass as fiction, looking before I started my first office job for a strong ending from page eighty-eight of what was most likely *Blame It on the Sun*, my second account of the unlikeable Ray Roden's adventures.

I gave up my slave-wage blackberry picking and rented a car to drive Joyce to Norwich St Faith's for the anniversary of Dad's death on 18 September. I helped Daub to rotavate his land. I scotched any thought of leaving home in good order and odour by upsetting most of the family the day before reporting to the Royal. I was drinking most of that Sunday, failing to say goodbye to Nan and Grandad and berated even by my equable farmer uncle, Tom, for being selfish. Surely they were all making a bigger deal of me starting what might turn out to be a career than I was? I would still be home practically every weekend.

3

The Royal

If the company chose Northampton for me as somewhere with a sizeable branch relatively close to my East Anglian fastness, as with Cambridge for university I would not have been averse to a greater distance from home. They kindly told me I would not be docked time for arriving nearer lunch than breakfast on Mondays and taking off early on Fridays to meet cross-country coach schedules.

So it was that on the morning of Monday, 25 September 1978 I had a bath in Isle Bridge Road, bussed to Wisbech then caught the National Express to Northampton, arriving at the Royal office on the marketplace about eleven. I reported to the administration manager, who would oversee my training. George Papadatos was proud of his nationality. Like my Latin teacher Ralph Roberts, George was a passionate Welshman, born in Cardiff. With longish black curly hair and a moustache, he spoke like you had to get used to not jumping on the tracks before he brought his well-freighted train of thought into the station. The slow delivery was usually worth the wait.

George passed me on for lunch to Nigel Cook, a stout, sandy-haired and heavily freckled Wolves fan aged thirty, working as a senior claims handler. Born and raised in Wolverhampton, Nigel had studied Russian at Manchester University. We went to a fancy burger joint, courtesy of Royal. Cagneys was not somewhere I would be able to eat every day on a starting annual salary of £3,250.

Older heads than mine would look back to days when, far from having a structured graduate development programme, lasting three years for Overseas recruits, training was 'sitting next to Nellie'. Although there was no one of that name in Northampton branch, I would often be leaving my own desk to park

my chair beside a woman. That first afternoon it was Linda Waring, a section head in Personal Department. As its name suggested and its location by the street door reinforced, its job was to deal with individuals who might want insurance, mainly motor or household.

Linda, an attractive redhead in her twenties, began the task of training me, the only male in the department and knowing less than its three teenagers – Janette, Heather and Penny. Meeting and mixing with young office girls, rather than students or ones who worked on the land, in pubs, shops or factories, was a new experience, floridly recorded.

Dave Daze Monday 25 September 1978: Northampton

... Interesting how already I've begun aggressively to assert the uncouth but noble (haha) country boy bit in an environment where decent behaviour is taken for granted. I hope I can keep* this aggression between these pages although I fear otherwise. Like early in Germany I may really need my diary now – a conspiracy between living and time-pinioned self against the world.

*ie. not retain it as something precious but prevent it wrecking my career

I was only sleeping four nights in Northampton compared to three at home or, on my second weekend of office life, the Saturday in London. Andy had called me the night before in Outwell to say that another Old Corpuscle, Geoff Dann, was having a party in Croydon. I hitchhiked to Cambridge then caught a train to London, stopping at Balham to meet Peter Stewart before heading further south. Pete, an Irish schoolmate of Andy's who had read law at Corpus Christi's neighbouring college Pembroke, was now practising in London, as was our host Geoff.

We spent little time before the pubs closed at the party, where Pete and I failed to wrestle Andy's car keys from him to drive home a couple of girls who preferred to catch a cab at three thirty in the morning. Jane, not put off by my dancing, found less impressive the balancing of a pint glass on my head when it crashed to smash on the floor. The next trick of setting fire to her hair was my final strike, for all it didn't properly catch. I ended up also hitting the floor with a sleeping bag Geoff dredged up, ceding it to Pete (on the settee) when I got quietly away in the morning for my long bus and train journey.

Royal had put me into the Poplars Hotel at Moulton, a little way out of town. They arranged a lift to and from work with Nigel's boss, who lived in that village. Head of Claims Ian Strain invited me to his home to watch football on telly after a pint at the Lumbertubs. The next Tuesday we were at the County Ground to see the Cobblers go down 3–1 to Stoke. Aged thirty-three and without great hopes for further career advancement, Ian was congenially acerbic company. Living alone in a nice house, he had the souvenir of a good best-man's joke from his wedding, on the bride's immediate future – 'I can honestly say she'll be under a great Strain tonight.'

I had no need to skulk alone at my lodgings. I quickly met up with David 'Spud' Plater, my closest mate at Wisbech Grammar for some years, now working in a Northampton bank. The first time, we had a few pints in the Abington in town before I caught the last bus back to Moulton. The next week we called on another transplanted Fenlander, Linda Wilson. I remembered her sitting on Spud's – Spud Murphy that is – lap in Geoff Clarke's Anglia, crammed with twelve more of us going home from a dance somewhere off our normal track. A year or more behind us at Wisbech Grammar, she was now living with a Jonathan and a cat.

As I had when a student in Germany two years earlier, I turned to a chess club as the nerd's refuge from any possible loneliness. I was put on to it by Nigel Cook, not only a more serious player than I but a better one. Losing to him did not gall as much as defeat (twice at that) upstairs in the Racehorse pub to a Yugoslavian show-off, simultaneously playing someone else.

As usual, drink was my main reason for socialising, at once incentive and anchor. Nigel introduced me to another of his passions as well as two other workmates on a midweek excursion to Farthingstone. Prejudiced against real ale, not having come across it in East Anglia, I had to be on my mettle in any trial by alcohol.

Nigel Ford worked in Commercial Department, aged twenty-one with curly red hair and no slimmer than his namesake Cook. Maybe it was the need to distinguish between two Nigels that led me to dub the older one Cookface, though nicknames with me are generally tokens of affection (however badly they may read or occasionally play with the recipient). Adrian Paintin was nineteen, still a trainee doing the rounds of the departments yet not lacking in confidence nor a capacity for beer, despite his slighter build. On successive nights I visited both Nigels' homes to play cards and continue drinking after the pubs closed. Cook had a bungalow in Duston on the outskirts of

Northampton, while Ford, not yet on the staff preferential mortgage scheme, lived with his parents in Rushden.

I was finding my work as easy as being back at school, and similar in levels of boredom. A quick study, I remember the standard rate for buildings cover was 0.125% not so much for its own sake but from the difficulty I had in grasping Linda's shortcut to calculate the premium it gave (knock two zeroes off the sum insured then divide by eight). That was as technical as it got. Blocky desk calculators were as near as we got to computers.

I was quiet in the office among my female immediate workmates, as ever in new company unless well oiled. Judy from Claims, the first punk I ever met (though within the bounds of respectable dress at the office), said she would lend me some black music when I got settled somewhere, after Nigel Cook had told her I liked it.

Royal were not going to stand me accommodation including a big-fry breakfast and four-course dinner indefinitely. Neither Spud nor Linda had any helpful tips on finding a billet as a new kid in town, so eventually I went out looking for myself. I found a single, small upstairs room in Gordon Street 'near the Cathedral in the heart of Paddy country'. I had given up my search a day or two earlier in favour of pints in an Irish pub nearby, then a last one round the corner from the office in the Criterion, 'outside which 3 or 4 cheerless looking whores were standing. It's nice to know where you can find em anyway.'

There was nothing censorious in either entry. For all my blasé world-weary pen, I would have been too timid or intimidated sober to approach any of the Criterion sex workers, if indeed that was not a trade I had conjured them from office gossip about the pub. My only experience of prostitutes was in Norwich, when I still had the Cortina after Dad died. I had parked up in Rose Street to let my shotgun go off with one ('brasses' he called them). Another came knocking on my window, possibly thinking I was snooping or putting off other punters. No business was done between us and I did not have to wait there long.

The comment that I might have to consider my options reflected a continued drought with women. I had spent a fruitless Saturday afternoon back home hitching to March to follow up a lead from its Grenadiers nightclub, where Dianna had given me a flower, nearly getting me into a fight when one of the Lee boys from Wisbech mocked me for it. I found the address she had given me a week later than I'd promised to go, slotted in a visit to her parents,

another to pay her rent (for her to pay it, I was not *that* besotted), drank her whisky and Bacardi, met her teenage brother: a lifetime relationship in five or six hours together, including cats, ducks and caged dogs. The only thing lacking was sex. At the Royal I had rightly recognised Judy as friendly rather than flirtatious, besides which the punk thing was as far outside my ken as real ale. I was most impressed by seventeen-year-old Penny in Personal, a shy blonde with an endearing lisp and glasses, soberly dressed in knee-length skirts and businesslike blouses, which could not entirely hide a curvy figure to back up a lovely face.

Two weeks after moving into my cubbyhole in the Gordon Street terrace block in late October 1978, I gave in my notice on it. I had stipulated I would need a lock on the door, or rather a working lock. The landlord had still not repaired it. I withheld my rent for a week or two, drawing phone enquiries of how I would like it if they came round to the office to ask me for it. I said that would be fine, confident I was in the right.

Maybe Penny wasn't as far beyond my reach as I tended to think all the best-looking girls were. She was there at the Insurance Institute quiz night towards the end of October, where after our knockout I partnered her at doubles pool in the Bantam Cock. She was in the Crown at Westone on Halloween, with the two Nigels, Adrian and others of our workmates. Still, it was alone that I ate a T-bone steak at Cagney's on my birthday, 1 November.

That evening, we men without women reconvened at the many-hutched Abington of those days. We ended at the Rubicon casino to which Cookface had already introduced me to round off the quiz and pool night. I envied him his seat at the roulette table, wishing I could afford to gamble.

Another wish had been noted from the sadly magnificent drunk Lowry's *Under the Volcano*: his Consul 'was aware of a desire at once for complete gluttony and oblivion and for an innocent youthful fling'. I drew another blank on the youthful fling, if not the gluttony and oblivion, at a party of his own Pete Stewart had reminded me of at the Croydon one, visiting the Highbury library first to see Arsenal tonk Ipswich 4–1 with a hat trick from future United stalwart Frank Stapleton. I began drinking again among the debris on the Sunday morning – eight or nine of us had slept on Pete's floor – with Andy looking out for me during that whole day, prodding me back to consciousness when necessary. Pointed in the right direction by him, I somehow caught the last train back to Northampton, clutching a *Men Only* magazine bought at the station in London, with drunken logic because there were no sandwiches.

My housemates in Gordon Street were Benny, an Italian waiter from Venezuela (I recorded doubtfully) and Alan, a Belfast boy who said he hated the Irish. I pegged them initially as 'decent blokes', going out for a drink, darts and rummy with Benny and his girlfriend. His black Lab pup Sandy completed the household, shitting in our shared kitchen and exercising his needle teeth on any bare feet crossing his path.

Ipswich were out of luck again in mid-November. Stevie, driving a car rather than van this time with Aidi, Stink and Bernie on board, picked me up in the market square at Northampton, to arrive at Old Trafford minutes before kick-off. Stevie Coppel and Jimmy Greenhoff saw off our unloved Suffolk cousins, a chilled beer saw off my day's second serving of fish and chips into a Doncaster gutter. My stomach settled by pub vodkas, Bernie, Stink and I hit a disco while Stevie and Aidi sat and sulked in the car. I knocked Mum up to let me in when we got back to Outwell around three on the Sunday morning.

That day I had to forgo my midday session at the Crown, as Tom, with wife Aunt Shirley (Joyce's youngest sister) and my cousin Mandy drove us back to Northampton. Maybe Mum was keen to see my lodgings. Despite the enhancement of a rented colour TV Benny had got in, I cannot imagine she would have been too impressed. There was still no lock on the fucking door.

I soon stopped diarying details of my working life, not much cause for regret (no room for it anyway, that box is already full). I had moved on to Commercial by the week of the Christmas dinner and dance at the Elizabethan, for which I had rested up on the Thursday after two successive nights out until three. Indulging another of Cookface's enthusiasms, I'd gone with him, Adrian, Judy and a friend of hers to a live music gig in Coventry, possibly on the promise of some nudity. Between the Innocents and the Clash, the Slits' lead displayed only her arse through cut green tights. Nigel and I got pissed (no stoner, he would always call it 'stoned') on Schlitz beer. Having given punk a go, I decided not to bother again.

The only commitment I had been able to wrangle from my elected future wife Wendy at the end of our Christmas parties was that she might accept that drink from me on another occasion. I couldn't follow up immediately as I was scheduled for a residential training course on the Wirral over the next fortnight. Having overslept the morning after we met and missed the bus back to East Anglia, I had a longer and tedious train journey. Grandad George, former bus driver Daub, must have felt at times he was now providing a substitute public transport system, always willing to fetch me the last leg

to Outwell, whether from the Horsefair at Wisbech or as on this occasion Downham Market railway station.

I had given up my tenancy of Gordon Street, reasoning there was no point in paying rent while the Royal was putting me up at Inglewood, a former country house converted into its training and conference centre. After another wearisome Sunday train trip to Liverpool, I felt uncomfortable at the luxury of a £17-a-night Holiday Inn in the city, room service and all. I took its courtesy car to the station and a local train service to Inglewood, in its own grounds down Badgers Rake Lane near Ellesmere Port.

If not tasked with catching lightning in a bottle during the course, by the end of it we were expected to be able to define fire. We were being eased from personal to commercial lines. Other objectives ranged from understanding business interruption covers and how liability arises to the smallest of small print in clauses such as PG1/62, DAMAGE TO CONTENTS OF SHOP WINDOWS and its little sister PG2/70, DAMAGE TO SHOPFRONT. The classroom sessions were more like the rote learning at school than the more relaxed style of university, where definitions in the subjects I had studied were woollier. I far preferred talk and chalk from teachers to more active student involvement in sessions.

Trainees' accommodation, once barracks or dormitory style, had been remodelled to four at most sharing a room. I was usually shy, quiet, defensive or aggressive in new company, but not antisocial. We were well fed and watered, not expected to do anything other than drink in the evenings, in which I did not lack for company and held my own. Held my water too. The Inglewood folk memory had one trainee flunking out after mistaking a course leader's bedroom for a bathroom in the middle of the night.

On the course's middle Saturday I had dodged the piss running down the slopes of the Kop at Anfield, and the tins topped up with it flying over my head. The famously warm-hearted and witty Liverpool fans' target – the cans all fell short, on their own people – was Nottingham Forest's right-back Viv Anderson, up to take a corner. The first black player to represent England as a full international would, like Frank Stapleton, fetch up eventually at United via Arsenal. I went to the match alone, partway on a company bus taking others into Liverpool for shopping or Caverning. Some living close to the site went home for the weekend.

I was buoyed during my spell in Scouseland by the promise of a drink with Wendy, eventually extracted in an evening phone call from Inglewood.

It was not my first to the number she had given me, an office one. We were to meet as soon as I returned to my own office, the Monday a week before Christmas Day.

She bailed on me. I was free to eat that evening at the Spencer Arms with the Nigels, Adrian and around fifteen others from the branch. The Commercial Department dinner was at Capri restaurant on the Tuesday, after which I went alone to Opus II nightclub. On the Wednesday I was out quietly with Linda and Jonathan. The office party on the Thursday was all over by eight thirty. My unappealing short-term accommodation was in Lower Hester Street. I went to haul Irish(-hating) Alan from my former house, ending up in Sands nightclub.

Not quite ending up. Although most of the shameful stuff is there, I declined to record certain things in Diary, took the Fifth. I don't know where I fell in with others or came across the bric-à-brac shop, or who put its big street window in. We went through it and, with an alarm going off, made haste to start robbing.