

It's November 1965. It had started snowing heavily at about 9 PM. My Dad will be at the pub till last orders, so the coast is clear for now. Mum lets me go out into the road and play with some of the other kids that have also been allowed this late-night treat. I can still remember the light cast down onto the snow from the streetlamp that stood outside number fifteen, like a standard lamp. Up the street, the lights reflected off the snow, and the night is almost as bright as the grey winter days. Snowball fights are kicking off all over the grass, now white as milk. On my hands: socks in place of gloves. Some kids are building a snowman, starting off with a small ball of snow, then rolling it along the ground to pick up more snow. Eventually, you have a big enough ball for a rather portly snow person (just keeping the PC brigade happy there). We are allowed to play for an hour or so until our fingers can't take it anymore and the sopping socks I have on instead of gloves have become more of a discomfort than a solution to the cold and wet. My fingers are stiff and painful pink with cold. I reluctantly go back to the house.

After a while and still up way past my bedtime, the dreaded sound of the front door key being inserted into the Yale lock. Shit, it's past kicking out time, only ten thirty back then. Quick as a flash Mum says, "Quick Willie, turn the telly over to BBC." I do as I am instructed, pushing the clunky buttons on the rented TV set. I can feel heat emanating from the hot tubes encased within. The channels switch, my dad flings the door open and immediately without a word turns the telly back to ITV- the channel my mum was watching a couple of seconds ago. He has no clue what's on or even is even interested in watching any telly; he is too pissed to focus on anything. He's just asserting his authority in his household. He turns to me and says, "You. Bed. Now." Without any protest, off I scurry up to my bed, impressed by what I was later to learn is called reversed psychology that my mum had employed- genius. This is a valuable lesson that I never forget.

The next day, I'm waiting with the usual gang of kids from the Village at the bus stop to take us to school. The snow is still coming down fast and it's getting towards 8:45 AM. It looks like the bus is not gonna turn up. Too scared to just go home, me, Davo, Bill Besant and a few others decide to walk to school. We trek the mile or so up the little path of the Pads across Mathew's farm fields. My feet are soaking wet and freezing. I am wearing the only shoes I have at the time, brown leather sandals with socks pulled up to the knee; shorts, the standard itchy grey thick flannel school uniform kind; a black duffel coat; and a knitted balaclava on my head. My little frosty face sticks out of the opening into the chilly morning. The cold grasping at my feet is nothing compared to the

excitement of going to school in the snow. My mind is racing with thoughts of all the fun we can have at playtime.

The slightly higher aspect of the path gives a good view across the farm and on towards Liverpool. The whitewashed landscape is a wonder to behold. Large flakes slowly drift down, softening the scene. The huge cranes normally standing to attention at the far away docks in Liverpool are now just a hint of grey, fragile twigs in the distance. I notice that the world's sound is changed; silence has replaced the background drone that generally accompanied life. The choked and belching growl of Ford Anglias, Consuls and Zodiacs, Morris Minors, Hilman Imps and Hunters, all now sleep still tucked up in flagged driveways or outside houses on the street, still and silent under cosy snow eiderdowns; they are going nowhere today. Any sound is dampened down, becoming part of the strange stillness that accompanies heavy snowfall. The outdoor world now has the same sound as the indoor world; near sounds are intensified and distant sounds faded and muffled. The view from the Pads over the fields is like looking through a misty window, the snow silently bleaching the landscape pure white.

When we get to school, there are only a few teachers that have made it in. One is Mr Carradine, the new headmaster. He seems almost as excited as the kids and throws a snowball at us. The kids retaliate, and a full-on fight ensues. The headmaster is pelted with snow till he, smiling, holds his hands up to surrender. I had never seen a teacher display this off-duty manner before, letting slip the stern-faced mask and allowing a glimpse of a human being; teachers were to be feared at all times.

As hardly any of the staff had turned up, we were allowed to go home early. Bill Roberts from the local shop had been called up and he came and got us in his canvas-covered ex-army Land Rover.

It seemed to snow a lot back then in wintertime. A couple of years earlier in '62 and on into '63, Britain had one of the worst winters recorded. The papers called it "the big freeze". The canals and rivers froze, the snow and ice sticking around from December till February. The stillness was always the thing I liked most. The snow clouds were like a ceiling above, creating the magical feeling of being indoors when outdoors. After the failure of the bus turning up, a new rule is made by the headmaster. If the bus doesn't turn up by a quarter to nine, we are permitted to go home. Every morning after that, we

stand at the bus stop hoping for the bus to have broken down or been late, even by a few seconds