

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES...

& Thoughts of Dad

by Linda Lee

MY DAD WAS A REAL CHARACTER. His name was Norman Wright, but he was always known as Tim, I am not sure why Tim but it suited his personality better than Norman. He was always a happy-go-lucky type of a bloke, always singing and whistling songs with all the wrong words, especially when taking Mandy the family dog out for a walk. He had a love of clean air and the peace and quiet of the countryside.

I can picture him now dressed in his old tweed jacket tied up with a piece of string and with bicycle clips on his trousers. If there had been any horses down the lane that day he would have a bucket and spade with him to collect the droppings to fertilise his garden. At the time we had one of the biggest gardens in Guston and it was always full of flowers and vegetables, his favourites being wallflowers which he would forever be trying to sell.

In the early days when I was still quite small we used to move around a lot because after Dad left the pits he found it very hard to settle down doing one job. He tried his hand at various things, often working as a farm labourer, and once as a grave digger. This did not last very long as it was too upsetting for him, especially when it involved small children.

When I was about five we moved to a place called Salton, back once again to working on a farm. We moved into a tied cottage set in the middle of a field with a dirt track running past either side, one leading to the farm and the other to the main road near the Swingate Inn. Mum always had to collect our mail from an old biscuit tin she left under a tree for the postman. It was much harder for her having to drag sacks of coal down the track to provide a bit of extra winter heat.

I loved the countryside but being the only child it could sometimes be a bit lonely.

At times like these I would go into the fields around about and talk to the cows. It was like having a complete secret fantasy family of friends. I was blessed the most vivid of imaginations, even the old toilet at the bottom of the garden was turned into my dream house where I used to go to look after all of my make-believe children.

That was, of course, until Dad went on one of his regular trips to Sandwich market; he could not stand for anything to be in a cage, so he would always buy it and bring it home. Poor Mum, she never knew what he would turn up with next. Once he came home with four geese and a brown duck, which was very exciting for me and it made a nice change from all the rabbits we already had. One bad night a fox got in and killed all our geese, but in the morning I was happy to find that Billy my brown duck had escaped unharmed. To make sure that he was safe Dad turned my little house (the old toilet) at the bottom of the garden into a refuge for him.

One night, out of the blue, Mum and Dad asked me if I wanted to go on a caravan holiday or to have a baby sister. Immediately I shouted, "A sister, of course". Then lo and behold after what seemed forever: in fact it must have been just a few short months, there arrived a little baby boy. At first I thought that this was very unfair as I had said that I wanted a sister. However I soon got over the disappointment and have always loved my baby brother a great deal.

When I started school at East Langdon, this being at least a mile and a half away meant that poor Mum had to walk me to school in all weathers. This, as well as a young baby to look after. Looking back I sometimes wonder how she managed it.

One evening after school Dad suddenly said that he was starting a new job at the Duke of York's School and we would be

moving to Guston. At first I was sad at having to leave our quiet and peaceful existence as I loved the country way of life. I was also sad because we had to leave my duck Billy behind. I gave him to our nearest neighbour to look after. Dad said that he probably ended up in the cook pot; I like to think that he lived to a ripe old age and passed away peacefully.

We settled into our council house at Guston quite quickly, with me at a new school and my brother just coming up to school age. We found it a friendly place and Mum got on well with the neighbours. What a big difference it made to her life being able to stop and have people to talk to. For my brother and me the highlight of day would be to see our Dad come home as he normally had some sweets for us. It did not matter how small they were: it made us feel special.

As we got older our parents started to take us out more. Mainly it was a day out to a nearby town. We were always excited and we always went by bus. If Dad sat next to a stranger then you can bet that by the end of the journey he would have invited them round for tea if they were ever in the area. Mum was only too pleased that no one ever took him up on the offer. Imagine what it would be like for a perfect stranger to turn up on your doorstep expecting tea.

As my brother grew older and started to take more of an interest in football and cricket there would be Dad playing along with all of the kids on the village green. A lot of the time it was not my brother the kids came for to play it was my Dad.

As I got older he was always making me laugh. He would try any silly thing if someone had told him it would cure an ill. Apparently boiled onions cure a cold and if you rub coconut oil on your head it will

make the hair grow: one of his favourites as by then he was getting a bald spot.

These are some of my treasured memories of Dad who, after a series of heart attacks, died only 47 years old on 20th April 1977.

I still miss him tremendously even after all these years and it makes me

sad that my husband and daughter never had the pleasure of meeting him. Mum and her new partner still live in Guston and over the years have made a happy life for one another.



Norman (Tim) Wright

I wish that I had had the chance to tell him that although we never had a lot of money or mod. cons. ours was a very happy childhood with a very special mum and dad.



Linda, Norman Wright, wife Ivy and Geoffery at Leysdown, Isle of Sheppey