

Academicals

I am driving from the W Academy with Drew (8) in the rear of my car on a Thursday evening in October 2023.

The W Academy is a football coaching organisation for those five years old and upwards. Currently they are meeting at Pollock Park (near the Burrell Building Museum) where they have taken over the grounds of the former Poloc Cricket Clubⁱ

After the recent heavy rains, the grass playing fields were soft, sodden and very muddy.

Drew has just told me he was a Sweeper Keeper, using sliding tackles.

'Grampa, I've never been muddier in my whole life.'

I can't resist. I sing the Hippo song chorus:

*Mud, Mu, Glorious Mud
Nothing quite like it for cooling the blood. . .*

Then, soaring into fantasy land, I add:

'Drew, did I ever tell you I used to be a Hippopotamus? I was in charge of the Mud Slide, the best job in the world.'

'Grampa, when we go to Dubai on Saturday, I'm going to the Water Park. There's a very, very big water chute there.'

'When you're in Dubai, what will you order to eat in the hotel?'

'My favourite food is pizza. I would eat pizza for breakfast and lunch and tea if Mum would let me.'

'Yes, me too. I really like pizza but with chips too.'

'Yeah, me too.'

'And I like lasagne and chips.'

'I like lasagne and chips too, Grampa.'

'And macaroni and cheese with chips.'

'So do I!'

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'Drew, do you want to know what I really, really like with chips?'

'What?'

'More chips!'

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We are stuck in a traffic jam right outside Pollokshaws Burgh Hall. My grandparents held their Golden Jubilee Wedding Anniversary in this building. I have strong connections with Pollokshaws. This is a building still thriving under community control. On Sunday 22 October, I will be there to listen to Gordon Creeⁱⁱ play its Wurlitzer organ.

Behind the Burgh Hall are the sad remains of the recently demolished Sir John Maxwell school which I attended when we lived in a single end in a Mews Building behind 84 Greenview Street.

Drew has heard some of my stories of when I lived there when I was his age and he knows about the school and pipes up.

'Grampa, that's where your old school used to be. They've knocked it down. How many schools have you been at?'

We are on new ground here. As we inch forward (roadworks ahead), I reminisce while in the back Drew listens at first but quickly loses interest, spending his time picking bits of mud off his legs.

'Well now Drew, I went to Sir John Maxwell school for P1 and P2 then to the Old Pollock Annexeⁱⁱⁱ from P3 to P7. That's a building which has been demolished too. I'll show you where it was when we reach it, just over the river, opposite the railway station up ahead.'

'Then I passed my Qualification Exam. It was a strange exam, full of weird questions and lots of diagrams and puzzles, nothing I had ever seen before. I managed to pass it and went on to secondary school at Shawlands Academy but when I left three years later, aged fifteen, I did not have any certificates because I hardly ever did any homework. Leaving was a bad move but I had not learned yet how important it is to study hard when you are at school.'

'My father persuaded me to enrol at Glasgow College of Building and Printing. You can see it at George Square, a huge multi-storey building. It was brand new back then but I was mainly at the Annexe at Whitevale Street in Dennistoun. It was an old school, a bit like Pollok Annexe, I seem to remember. It was there I did three

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months on a pre-apprenticeship course for the building industry. It took absolutely ages to get there on two different trams to a part of Glasgow I did not know. Everything was a bit scary and the boys on the course were rough, swearing and smoking and spitting and picking fights. Some were Celtic supporters and others were Rangers supporters. They wanted me to choose sides but when I said I was a Third Lanark supporter, they made fun of me, saying it wasn't a 'real team'.

'I left that course halfway through to go to the Shipyard Training School at Alexander Stephen and Sons at Linthouse learning to become a Ship's Plumber. They enrolled me on a City and Guilds course for Marine Plumbing. My Dad was really annoyed that I wanted to do this but after a big argument, he said I could do it. Lots of the other boys where I lived were apprentices at Stephens, so I knew a lot of people who worked there, boys from schooldays and neighbours. I was glad to get away from the other course. Those boys were too tough for me.

'During this time as an apprentice Ship's Plumber, a Marine Plumber, I went on a short night school course to Stow College for lead burning and gas welding. One night I set my hair on fire by accident. I was okay though because the teacher saw it happening and put out the fire in my hair by slapping my head with a leather glove. Then he wiped the scorch mark with Vaseline. Although it was a stupid thing to have done, I was a sort of hero back at Stephens for a few days and everyone wanted to see my burn mark.

'Then my mother suggested that I should go back to the College of Building and Printing to evening classes to do a course called City and Guilds for Domestic Plumbing. This was a hard thing to do in the winter after working all day, but my Mum forced me to do it. I kept that up for five long winters and passed all the exams.

'At Stephens I went into the Shipyard Drawing Office Training School learning to become an apprentice Ship Draughtsman. At first this was on a six-month trial basis but I passed the test and changed from being a Marine Plumber apprentice to being a Ship Draughtsman apprentice. Stephens then sent me on a course at Anniesland College to study for a City and Guilds Shipbuilding Technician's Certificate.

'During this time, I was allowed to keep studying for the Marine Plumbing course by private study and I passed these exams too.

'Then Stephens allowed me to go to Springburn College to do the City and Guilds Heating and Ventilation Technicians Certificate and I passed it too.

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'I had a new ambition by then and wanted to go to Strathclyde University to get a degree. By this stage I had quite a lot of qualifications but none of them were good enough to get me into university. Another important part of this was that I had met Grandma. She was my girlfriend then and she really encouraged me and helped me to study hard.'

'Then I went to David Dale College on an evening course to do an Ordinary National Certificate in Mechanical Engineering. This was a first step. Then I went on to Glasgow College of Technology to do a Higher National Certificate (HNC). The exams were harder. To get into University, I needed a Higher Certificates in English and Chemistry, so I went to evening classes at Allen Glens School. I also went to Langside College to get a Higher Certificate in Technical Drawing just to show that I had a few Highers as well as my HNC. .

'Then I went to Strathclyde University to do a Batchelor of Science with Honours in Environmental Engineering.

'When your Dad and Uncle Stuart were wee boys, I was a Lecturer at Strathclyde and did extra studying to earn a Master of Science degree.

'Then I left Strathclyde University to join Hulley and Kirkwood. During that period of twenty-two years, I was an External Examiner at Glasgow University and at the University of Northumbria in Newcastle.

'Then, when I was fifty-four, I retired from Hulley and Kirkwood and became a Visiting Professor and part-time Lecturer at Caledonian University. (Caledonian had once been Glasgow College of Technology but by then it had been upgraded to become a University.)

'Now that I was retired from full-time working, I became a student again and enrolled for classes at Strathclyde University at the Centre for Lifelong Learning where I studied Italian, Drawing and Painting, Acrylics, Hand Built Pottery, Latin, How to Sing and Creative Writing.'

'Grampa, did you just make all that up? I can't remember anything after the bit about you leaving school when you were fifteen because you didn't want to study hard. Did you just make everything else up?'

'No, Drew, it's all true, every word. Honest Injin! I can show you all my certificates.'

'Grampa, what will we tell Grandma when we get home. She'll be wondering why we're late.'

'Well, here's an idea, do you remember when I said I was a Hippopotamus?'

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'Yes. You were in charge of the Mud Slide.'

'Yeah, I had to go to Mud Slide Training School for that too. Anyway before I was a Hippopotamus I was a snail and I was slithering along quite happily one day in a garden. I think the garden was in Bearsden. Then I got this horrible feeling something really bad was about to happen and just as I turned to look over my shoulder, a great big foot came crashing down on me. Do you know, I think it was Grandma's foot because she hates slugs because they eat her plants.'

'Is that when you became a Hippopotamus, after you were a snail?'

'Yes, then after I was a Hippopotamus, I was a Giraffe. Now, Drew, most folk think that Giraffes have an easy life living in Africa where it's hot and sunny all the time but that's not totally true. When it rains in Africa it really, really rains, sometimes for days at a time and well, I think you can guess what the problem is for a Giraffe when that happens, can you?'

'What?'

'Well, Drew, it is almost impossible to get an anorak to fit a Giraffe and as you'll have guessed, Wellington boots for such long legs are completely unobtainable.'

'Grampa, we are really stuck here. Should we phone Grandma and tell her?'

'Oops, sorry, Drew, no phone. It's at Bearsden, I think. So, you'll have to tell her because she never believes a single word say. So, here's what I suggest you say:

"Grandma, we were stuck in a huge traffic queue. We were five cars behind a very slow Slithering Snail who was being followed by a Very Muddy Hippopotamus who was being followed by Giraffe wearing an anorak that was too small for it."

'Have you got that Drew? Will you remember it?'

'Grampa, do you know a song called *Doe a Deer*? We sing it at school. I really like that song. Singing on Monday afternoons is the best lesson we get.'

'Excellent. Right then, Drew, off we go:

*"(Do) Doe , a deer, a female deer,
(Re) Ray, a drop of Golden Sun,
(Mi) me, a name I call myself,
(Fa) Far, a long, long way to run,*

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*(So) Sew, a needle pulling thread,
(La) La, a note to follow So,
(Ti) Tea, a drink with bread and jam,
That will bring us back to do, oh, oh, oh.*

ⁱ Poloc Cricket Club ceased to exist on 30 April 2023. The W Academy have taken over the tenancy of the house and grounds with plans to develop as a Soccer Training Centre. Previously the W Academy were based at the five-asides courts at Ruken Glen Park.

ⁱⁱ Gordon Cree is an absolute music legend in Scotland. In addition to being a fantastic organist, he plays piano for the Mackintosh Choir (I'm a member) and many other organisations. See his website and YouTube for more information: <https://www.gordoncree.co.uk/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Pollpck Annexe was the original school in Pollokshaws, built before the much grander red sandstone Sir John Maxwell School funded my Sir John when he owned all the land in the area and lived at Pollock House in Pollok Estate.