

Chapter 34
1950 – 1957
Cambusbarron / Stirling / Bannockburn
Home, School and Play – 1955-56 (iv)

Breakthrough – Broken Heart – Fractures – Bouncing Back

In my ‘Preface’ to these memoirs I say,

“People’s lives are sketched out within the moving pages of history from the various ways in which they have been influenced by heredity, the march of time, people encountered, places lived in or visited, and events experienced. On reflection each of these facets of living in detail can be judged as blessing or curse.”

As 1955 rolled on into and through to June 1956, perhaps, on reflection, *curses* **and** *blessings* would have been more apt descriptions of God working in my life in mysterious ways!

After the euphoria of rugby success in the Spring of 1955, I was fortunate enough in the summer term to make another ‘breakthrough’ – this time, probably from my genes, with pen on paper.



I had always desperately wanted to get something of my own writings into the school magazine, “School on the Rock”, that was prepared, edited and published by senior pupils each year in June. Of course, although I had appeared in many of the sports’ team photographs over the years, and had enjoyed, like many of my peers, the ephemeral fame of autographing copies of magazines purchased by hero-worshipping juniors, I felt then that for me, after three previous years’ failures, writing an acceptable short story or poem was probably away, way beyond my powers. However, undaunted, typically persistent, perhaps buoyed up a bit with sporting conceit, and certainly challenged by literary frustration, I decided to have yet another go at it.

I had watched my father composing lyrics to the tune of Murdoch and Horne's 'Much Binding in the Marsh' in order to entertain folks at inter-school camp concerts where his cheeky rhymes had poked gentle fun at some of his colleagues and their pupils alike. So, in due course, my smiling recollections of such as those gave me the bright idea to try to ditty in similar fashion for the school magazine. However, although I had managed privately to compose quite a few amusing, if trivial, lyrics about my sports’ team-mates, there had always been a major obstacle to their possible appearance in the magazine. They needed musical accompaniments to bring the best out of them!

So, I had to do something else. But, alas, no inspiration came until my father, recognising my confusion, even depression, mentioned the word 'parody'. First stop for me then was the dictionary, closely followed by my sifting through Palgrave's 'Golden Treasury' until Walt Whitman's, “My Captain, Oh My Captain” caught my eye and took my fancy. Thus, in due course, our 1st XV skipper - *ironically enough nicknamed, ‘Braco’* - Brian Greatbatch's sore,

sore injury in an epic match that season had provided the theme for my 'breakthrough' parody in the 1955 Magazine.

The summer holidays provided two more 'breaks'.... namely, becoming Boy Champion at Stirling Municipal Tennis Club, and my first experience of the joys and agonies of 'young love', already recorded in the previous chapter. This latter, indirectly led to what was jocularly termed in the family as 'John's heartbreak'. When the inevitable 'Dear John' situation evolved, I philosophically, if still immaturely, accepted my father's kindly advice of 'Laddie, always remember that there are many, many other fish in the sea!'

However, as this was going on, I got a bit of a fright one day when a persistent pain in my chest caused my mother to arrange for a cardiogram examination at the local hospital. She was honest enough with me by explaining the fears that she had always had that her own very serious bout of glandular fever as a teenager might show up in the youthful days of me, the baby that she had been firmly told by the medics never to even consider having. In the event, the cardiogram proved all was well, probably 'heartburn', (not 'heartache'!), but that my non-stop sporting activities had probably been taking their toll on my over-rapidly developing 16 year old anatomy and physiology. Six weeks rest from all physical sport was prescribed but in two weeks time the new school rugby season was about to start in earnest!

I was not normally disobedient, but as soon as I felt well enough again in about ten days, I, on purpose, failed to inform the games' master, and also the new 1st XV skipper, Fleming Smith, of my temporary ban. Thus I was selected for the first match of the season against Bell-Baxter School at Cupar, Fife. On the pretext of going along to merely support the team, I managed to slip out of the house early that Saturday morning, collected my kit-bag secreted in our garage, and joined the coach in Station Road, Stirling bound for Cupar.

Bell-Baxter with their renowned Coach, 'Jock' Blair, were always a force to be reckoned with, and that September morning in 1955, they had no fewer than three current Midland District representative Schools' players in their line-up – David Whyte (later in the adult game to play for Scotland), Ally Mackie (later similarly to play for North and Midlands) and Ian Beattie (later – like myself - to play for Glasgow).

Anyway, I drew first blood with a corner try and conversion in the opening exchanges. But, as I was popping over the kick for the extra two points, I felt that my right arm was not really part of my body. I rushed to the side-line, asked our supervising teacher, Mr Robertson, for his scarf, and then got him to bind it tightly round my forlorn looking wrist. I then put my shirt back on with the 'liability arm' inside it but not in its sleeve, and then pushed the unoccupied sleeve down inside too. Thus, 'one-armed', I re-entered the fray.

Strangely the opposition did not over-exploit me, the 'one-armed full-back', and thus paid the penalty ... as I not only scored the last try to win the match, but also kicked all three conversions in our 15-12 victory.

When I removed the scarf after the final whistle, I almost fainted from the excruciating pain that hit me. Hurriedly I had the scarf replaced even more tightly than before, put on a brave

face, accepted my team-mates plaudits, ate a somewhat less than hearty lunch, slept on the coach home, woke up wondering how to explain my 'accident' to my parents, hid my misery from them for about a couple of hours but eventually had to tearfully tell all.

Dad, with wonderful understanding, whisked me off to hospital. The X-ray showed a 'Colles Fracture' and immediate surgery was undertaken. Thereafter, suitably 'plastered and woosey', I was picked up and driven home by Dad with not even one word of admonition about my stupidity. As I dutifully climbed the stairs to bed later that evening, he poked his head round the sitting-room door, and ever so quietly murmured, "At least you won. But you'll have that period of rest after all!"

I returned to the fray in early December, and, true to form, had one of my big front teeth knocked out that day in the match against Dollar Academy. But the drop-goal from near the touch line that I made as I received the 'bloody' smack brought us a 3 – 0 win Henderson was back with a bang!

No enforced rest this time. But by the January, I was in the wars again! This time a broken foot bone during 'touch-rugby' in the quadrangle at school finished my season. With Higher examinations to be sat in March, no further risks were thought wise. I agreed, and thereafter, albeit temporarily, concentrated on more important things.

After the rigours of the Highers we all went into the summer term with a skip in our step including me, despite my foot still not being quite right! My priority activities, among other things, like County cricket and the retention of my tennis title, featured another attempt at poetry writing for the magazine. This time, I composed an original! And although I have mislaid my numerous back-copies of the 'School on the Rock' magazine, I can still recall the opening lines of my effort to describe experiences of the recently suffered Higher Leaving Certificate Examinations:

TAKE PITY ON CLASS V!

The fifth of March,
The fateful day,
Class V is quiet,
Has nothing to say
But "What's the time?"
"Quick, we'll be late."
Ten minutes early or the whole lot wait!

Read the notice.
Are you A to M,
or N to Z?
But of course an awkward Ned,
Right to the teeth with knowledge fed,
To the wrong room gaily goes.
The Rector advances,
Ned soon knows
By that look so fierce and long
That something now is really wrong.

Suddenly he realizes:
Room I's no place for X and Y's.
Blushing he rises,
An apology mumbles,
And down to Room 7 he sadly stumbles.

School, surname, number of seat,
And birth date also; quite a feat
To write correctly this information.
But Ned can still make consternation.
Being one month old for "Highers" days
1/2/56 his paper says.
"Born last week were you, Ned?"
"No, '39 . . . oh my poor head!"
Ned passed!!

JOHN HENDERSON (Class V).

