

Chapter 71

Autumn 1966 – Summer 1967 – Autumn 1967

The start of the University session in early October, 1966 coincided with my retiring from playing first class rugby for Jordanhill College after a long run of turning out for the 1st XV for eight seasons in one hundred and eighty-one matches - in the process scoring one thousand and sixty-two points. Thereafter, through the Autumn and Winter, instead of playing rugby on Saturdays, I accompanied the University Soccer 1st XI as ‘trainer/medico’ while they progressed through the preliminary stages of the Scottish Cup at the expense of, for example, Gala Fairydean to earn a tie against the mighty Glasgow Celtic at the Varsity Playing Fields, Westerlands. We had a sprinkling of Scottish amateur internationalists in our side, including our goalkeeper, Bobby Hogg, son of a former well-known Celtic player, and it was no surprise, when, in an exciting afternoon for ‘underdogs’, we put up a very creditable show in holding the Celts to a mere 2-1 win.

The camaraderie with my soccer lads was great, but I missed the traditional rugby socialising in the pub with the opposition after games. However, it did mean that I got home to Stirling much earlier on Saturday evenings. Just as well, because my week-day commitments at the university now included further degree classes in Astronomy and Anatomy/Physiology – 10 hours of lectures and 3 hours laboratory work – thus more studying at home in Springwood Avenue, e.g. late nights searching the skies with my telescope, and more evening shifts in the Stevenson Building to compensate for my unavailability for some of my former day-shifts. However, the ‘madness’ of this degree-seeking mania that I possessed only continued until Easter, 1967, when, although I had been doing very well with the challenging mathematics of, for example, Astronomy’s spherical trigonometry, I had been finding the laboratory work with its emphasis on microscopic studies of tissues etc. in Physiology stretching my lack of 3-D acuity to an absurd level of incomprehensibility! The ‘last straw’ was having to handle, **with great care**, radio-active material in the lab. I reckoned this was too dangerous for a married man with family ... and I was also failing to put in enough time surveying the night skies to complete my practical assignment log-book for Astronomy. So, yet again, I ‘retired’ from degree studies and got on with normal professional work and family life. In fact I was getting so bored with the recreational teaching freedom of the Stevenson, although not the company of my colleagues there, that I applied for a number of school teaching posts around April, 1967. The one that I really fancied was as Special Assistant in Mathematics and Games at Belmont House Preparatory School in Newton Mearns, serving the wonderful headmaster there, Mr Bond, and his team of dedicated staff. It soon became clear that the Belmont Governors considered me too good a catch to miss, so I was able to negotiate an above-average salary for a late-August 1967 start there. Apart from anything else, I had always wanted to sample the private sector in education, and, indeed, the short, but very successful experience that I had

at Belmont, served me well in my subsequent quest for a primary school headship back in the state system.

This appointment caused us to market 29 Springwood Avenue in Stirling and seek a home in more affordable Giffnock, a few miles from expensive Newton Mearns. In the event, we sold in Stirling for £4800 pounds, bought 10 Graffham Avenue in Giffnock for £4200, and moved to the city during the early June 1967 heatwave.





Our new home at 10 Graffham Avenue in Giffnock, Renfrewshire, was a semi-detached four apartment villa and about half-way down Braidholm Road, off to the right, as it ran from the centre of Giffnock to Muirend. It had an over-grown postage-stamp back garden ... mostly bushes with access to a track at the rear leading to a farm where the famous boxer Peter Keenan was reputed to live.

Inside to the left of the front hallway, reached from the main door and steps at the side of the house, was a narrow rectangular lounge with an archway leading to a four by three dining area with its window overlooking the back garden. A door off this dining area led through to the kitchen that could also be accessed from a door in the hallway and from the back door and the back-garden steps. The first batch of steps to the upper floor started to the left of the main side door and quickly turned 180 degrees to climb up parallel to that side of the house, before, at a small landing off which was a small bathroom, it turned at right angles onto the short upper hallway that had two bedrooms above the lounge and dining area, and a cabin-sized room to the front that eventually took Evan's bed beside a huge built-in wall cupboard and nothing much else! Naturally this 'cubby-hole' was soon dubbed, 'Evan's Cabin'.

We installed our electric storage heaters brought from Stirling and, in order to physically separate lounge and dining room, we quickly got a joiner at work filling the archway with two frosted-glass doors. We then did our own carpet-fitting and curtain-hanging throughout using what we had again brought from Springwood Avenue etc and soon were comfortably settled.

I was still working at the University until the end of June and travelled there daily by using the suburban train-line from Muirend to Glasgow Central, and thereafter the Underground from Buchanan Street to Kelvinbridge. However, purchasing a car, our first, soon became a priority. In this respect, brother-in-law Bill Waiters, [Olive's sister Helen's husband] was most helpful as a friend of his was a car salesman in nearby Eglinton Toll. He soon fixed us up with a not too elderly dark green 1600 cc Ford Corsair Automatic like this one



My passion for cricket undaunted, I, even before the house-moving dust had settled in June, was fulfilling my promise to Tom Robertson, to join nearby Poloc Cricket Club and thus meet their need for an experienced wicket-keeper in the top side that participated in the Western Union League. Their ground, Shawholm, on the Pollok Estate was only a ten-minute cycle run away on my trusty Raleigh Lenton and thus Tuesday and Thursday evenings, plus Saturday afternoons, found a perhaps premature priority place in my diary!



Shawholm – Poloc C.C.

But, by mid-July, Olive and I both felt that we needed a wee holiday, so, after searching the Daily Record advertising section, we managed to fix-up a week in digs in Aberdeen. And thereby, we hoped that Evan as a three-year old would get another taste of sea and sand-castling!

Meantime, Olive, as a gift from my Mum and Dad, was taking weekly car-driving lessons locally. ... not in the Corsair, it being an Automatic, but in the driving-school's manual transmission cars. In due course, Springtime 1968, she passed her Driving Test at her first attempt!

The Aberdeen trip, well looked-after by our land-lady in King Street, was good once we got there after two or three hiccups, including a lengthy stop in Forfar when the Corsair suddenly stalled on a hill and wouldn't restart. That was where it being an Automatic was a real nuisance ... no rolling start, even downhill far less uphill. I seem to remember a passing motorist taking pity on us and getting us on our way eventually with jump-leads. Later, of course, we learned that the battery in the second-hand car had been on its last-legs.



Back in Giffnock in late August, I made several visits to Belmont House School to learn more about my future activities in both the Mathematics and Games Departments. My Maths. commitments would involve three groups of 9, 10, 11 year-olds plus daily responsibilities for a table of pupils while we all took lunch and two late-afternoons per week at tea after games but before taking Prep. Supervision until around 5pm. Games lessons' organisation, i.e. rugby in winter, cricket in summer, with the help of selected members of staff for all senior and junior pupils on alternate days would become my main responsibility. In addition, as Master i/c Rugby, I would confirm all external fixture arrangements and select all necessary teams. Nothing new in the games' aspects of this as I had been doing such ... and more at the High School of Stirling from 1962-65.

I do not have a photograph of the main school building in the 1967-68 session ... but this modern one is not much different ... except that then, the building was painted greyish!



But here is my unbeaten 1st Team Squad then,



Belmont House School 1st Team Squad - Master i/c, Mr John Henderson

One of the big plus points of my new job turned out to be free morning coffee with home baking, free three-course lunch with after lunch coffee and biscuits, and free afternoon tea with more home baking. All this brought a significant reduction in our normal grocery bills at home!

The staff were friendly and highly committed people. The pupils were extraordinarily polite and respectful. The parents who I had the pleasure of meeting at various gatherings ... rugby matches, school concerts, fund-raising events etc. were forever expressing their appreciation of what we were doing for their offspring. And Mr Bond, the Headteacher, while always business-like, was one of nature's most delightful gentlemen an unforgettable character who made you want to work your boots off to serve his cause and one who constantly expressed his thanks and appreciation for your work for Belmont.

On the home front in September we lived quietly for a while. But not for long, as word had reached the ears of Clarkston Rugby Club supremo, Andy Williams, that John Henderson of Jordanhill and Glasgow, was living in the area and apparently not turning out for any other Glasgow club. So, in due course I was invited along to meet the lads at Overlee Park and think about joining them in their ‘crusade’ to become a recognised un-official championship club. I went along and did some light training with them under the gas-floodlights but made no promises except that I would see how I felt after playing a ‘trial’ game in the 1st XV. I was immediately drafted into the next Saturday’s team and that became the start of a marvellous season with my new friends the likes of Brian Williams and Dougie Baird, and committee man Glen Stirling to mention just three. The pace of the game was not so high at that level and as usual my place-kicking made significant impacts on many matches. Then, although I had already learned that my talents in general field-play did not really match the demands of Inter-District matches, I was willing to play for Glasgow Juniors if selected. The opportunity duly came in Springtime 1968 v Ulster Juniors where, as fellow debutant, [later British Lion] Gordon ‘Broon frae Troon’ Brown, years after kept telling any company in our joint presence, “John’s boot won the game that day at Auldhouse for our 14 man side (no injury substitutes in these days) six penalties he kicked .. no less!”