

Chapter 76

St Cyrus - Winter 1968/69, Spring 1969

Life for us based in Schoolhouse, St. Cyrus gradually took on a fairly regular pattern, but with seasonal variations of course. Initially from early morn till early evening, and very occasionally through the night, luckily, there was baby Kerr to be tended ... his sleeping/waking/nursing and being 'perambulated' in the fresh air; there was Evan, not yet of school-age, showing helpful independence and contentment with his 'match-box' and 'home-made' toys, picture books, TV, garden tree-swing and passion for football; there were only a few visitors during the day for Olive ... postman, milkman, husband at morning-break, lunchtime and tea-time ... plus required calls from the district nurse, and from our GP from Inverbervie, Dr Morrison.



It was in many ways a somewhat lonely existence for Olive as we soon realised that the village adults tended to respect the privacy of the schoolhouse occupants to a fault. However, with Ivor our neighbours' son returning at 3pm from school, and Evan ever ready to invite wee folks of roughly his own age to play in our garden after school, Olive, in due course, and especially by spring 1969, had oversight of small groups of youngsters who did not share the shyness of their parents. This was a blessing really as all these children were on the whole very well-behaved no doubt, partly so, because they sensed the firm but friendly nature of Evans teacher-mother's supervisory tactics!



Evan Henderson in summer, 1969

After tea-time I would normally take my turn doing some Baby Kerr and Infant Evan Minding' I would change Kerr's nappies, bring up his windy-pops and then walk the floor with him in my arms ever watching the fluttering eye-lashes gradually slow until they closed, often momentarily (!) and then, to Olive's great amusement, start walking and billy-cooing once more until he was ready for his carry-cot and sweet-dreams.

Next, as I had done since Evan's earliest years, I would get him into the bath and supervise his ablutions, amidst, even as a four-year old, armadas of rubber ducks and boats, of which latter distractions 'Tubby Tug' remained our mutual favourite. Then after checks round the bathroom's skirting boards for signs of any more field-mouse activity, we would repair upstairs to his bedroom, for picture-story-book time, my telling of my latest ad lib episode of 'The Adventures of Squeaky Mouse', and finally whatever self-created nonsense song I happened to recall. Thankfully, repetition, as ever with youngsters, was especially welcomed, but my penchant for changing the ending of a previously told story, or song, was usually greeted with disappointment or disbelief, or, if I had been in particularly good form, hilarity ... not usually recognised as the best of preparation for a child dozing-off, but, in Evan's case, a known signal to him that the bed-light would soon be dimmed and that Dad would be off downstairs to his writing board, or away out to some meeting or other.

The board-work usually comprised ... catching-up on my 29 pupils' exercise books lying uncorrected due to limited time having been found during the busy school day, or carefully writing up minutes of church meetings in ink by copying them from previous pencil drafts, or, especially on a Sunday evening, composing my first ever sorties into sports journalism for the weekly 'Montrose Review' newspaper concerning the details of how my new club, Montrose RFC, had fared in our

Saturday match. The village meetings that I had to attend have been mentioned previously, but all things considered, both Olive and I were usually two very tired parents ready for bed long before the little silver dot was due to disappear at about 11pm on TV close-down.

In what time was left for any social life, we would have liked to have played some 'round-the-fireside' Contract Bridge, but for over a year we were unable to find any like-minded friends locally to join us. So that form of relaxation, especially by Olive, was sorely missed. But, before Christmas in 1968, we did hold one memorable dinner party for the elderly Davidson couple who lived in 'Rosebank' nearby. Captain Davidson of course had been, as Convener of Kincardineshire Education Committee, instrumental in my appointment as St. Cyrus' dominie, and it was well known that he liked a 'touch of the malt'! Our modest financial resources were really stretched to allow us to table a good wine for the meal, and some Glenfiddich for before, and after dinner. But we had a great evening together, somewhat helped no doubt by both men's tongues being considerably loosened, and mine being totally unaccustomed to hard liquor! However, I do remember Mrs Davidson as she thanked us on departure about midnight, saying prophetically, "I don't suppose you two youngsters will stay here very long, but we're sure it will be an unforgettable episode in your professional and family life."

Our sojourn in fact only lasted two years and six months But it was indeed memorable!

As I write this section of my memoirs in September, 2008, here is some proof

St. Cyrus - Kirkton Braw

An imaginative poem by John -- as seen through the eyes of John's son, Evan, many years ago!

Ah'm mynded o the kirkton braw thit Ah growd'd up in,
Schuled an kirked Ah wis up tap its scaar;
Ah hear aince mair ma faither's vyce fyle Ah wis lernin,
Saff in-by fae hairm an wintry haar;
Ah dit ma een an wanner tae dream o days back yonner,
An fess mair o ma leesome mem'ries nar ...
O the saans, syne, whaur fowks catch'd the reidfish
Ilk nicht till skreek o day;
O the lorries aye hurlin Sooth fae Aiberdeen,
An the fairmers fowks oot gaith'rin hay.
Anse the scaar faar the auld kirk steeple,
The oorly chimes wid soon,
An ivver in the simmer, ilk man wi his kimmer
Oot waakin aa the roddies aroon.

St Cyrus Ah'll aye mynd ye,
E'en noo ye are ow'r biggit
Wi mair licky chiels aa bidin in yer airms;
Ah hear aye yit the waves' skirp,
As the daily tides rowed slaa-in
An the jilpin feet o paidlin bairns.
For ye ma phizog's aye smilin,
E'en noo ye're shair beguillin,
Ma youthheid-kirkton, St Cyrus, fu o chairms.