

After school, like all children at that time, we were keen to eat and then go out to play. Games were simple and very often we kicked a tennis ball around the street, played marbles, hide and seek or cowboys and Indians. Billy often complained, because mother told him to take me with him when he went out to play. At 18 months his junior he did not want me playing with him and his friends. Later in the war years mother had enough money saved to buy a second-hand Raleigh bicycle for 5 pounds for my brother Billy. This started, as can be imagined, questions to mother about when I would be getting a bicycle. I could not ride Billy's bicycle, because the frame was too big for me and Billy did not want me to ride it. Eventually, mother had the money to buy me a bicycle and since she could not locate a used bike, we had to ride the inner circle 8 bus to Coventry Road, a main shopping street, and look for a bike there. Finally, we found a bike which was a new BSA model costing 10 pounds. I was so delighted with the bike, that to avoid any possibility of my damaging it, I would not ride it home. Instead, I walked all the way home, about 5 miles, pushing it. It was not long, however, before I was racing it around the roads without worrying what damage was occurring. When Billy saw my bike and heard the price, he became upset and was frequently heard muttering about the younger brother being the favourite.

Entertainment in the home was also simple. We had the radio and listened to popular programmes such as ITMA with Tommy Handley, Much Binding in the Marsh with Kenneth Horne and Richard Murdoch and then my favourite Dick Barton, Special Agent. These radio programmes were good for using the imagination. We also enjoyed going off to the woods with some sandwiches and a bottle of lemonade and spending all day there. The other main source of entertainment was the Olympia Cinema on Ladypool Road, which I visited most Saturday afternoons. For two pence I could go to the matinee and watch a cowboy movie in black and white, usually Roy Rodgers or Hopalong Cassidy, followed by a serial that went on from week to week such as Flash Gordon. Two other cinemas in the area were the Piccadilly on Stratford Road and the Carlton.

Another favourite excursion was to catch the number 11 bus on the outer circle route and travel around the perimeter of Birmingham. We passed the Edgbaston Cricket ground and Bourneville where Cadbury's Chocolates were located and through areas of Birmingham we would never otherwise have seen. Many of these areas were well laid out and had grand houses obviously belonging to rich people. Another good day out was to take a bus to Bristol Road and there catch a tram, which ran in the centre of the road. These trams were double decked and each end at the top was open with no roof. These were the seats that every child wanted and the competition for them was fierce. The view from the top was exciting going along the Bristol Road passing Birmingham University on our way to the Lickey Hills. The countryside was not the only attraction, because there was an arcade at the terminus with many one penny slot machines. Later, at about 10 years of age, I became interested in train spotting and bought a book giving the numbers of each steam engine owned by the Great Western Railway (GWR). Also included in this book were the engines with names in the Hall, Castle or King classes and these were the prized engine to spot. One place to do this was on the bridge over the railway line at Tyseley, but the best was to go into town to Snow Hill station, the GWR terminus in Birmingham, and pay two pence for a ticket to be allowed on the platforms. There I could see at close quarters the steam engines in all their glory.

Another simple pleasure was fishing in the canals with a length of bamboo cane, some string and a bent pin for a fish hook. This was great fun until one day my brother Billy tripped and fell into the canal. He could not swim and we were fortunate to find a broken branch with which to get him out. Fortunately, there was a pub close to the canal and having heard the commotion we were making, some of the patrons came out and took us inside. The publican got Billy a blanket and allowed him to dry off in front of an open fire. Whilst this was happening, the men in the pub had a collection for Billy. Thus it was, that Billy went home dry and less enthusiastic about fishing, but richer.

Part of our leisure time was taken up by the Wolf Cubs initially and later by the Boy Scouts. Billy and I plus our friends Brien Ward and Ronnie James belonged to the 1st Moseley Athletic Troop, which met once each week in a local school hall.