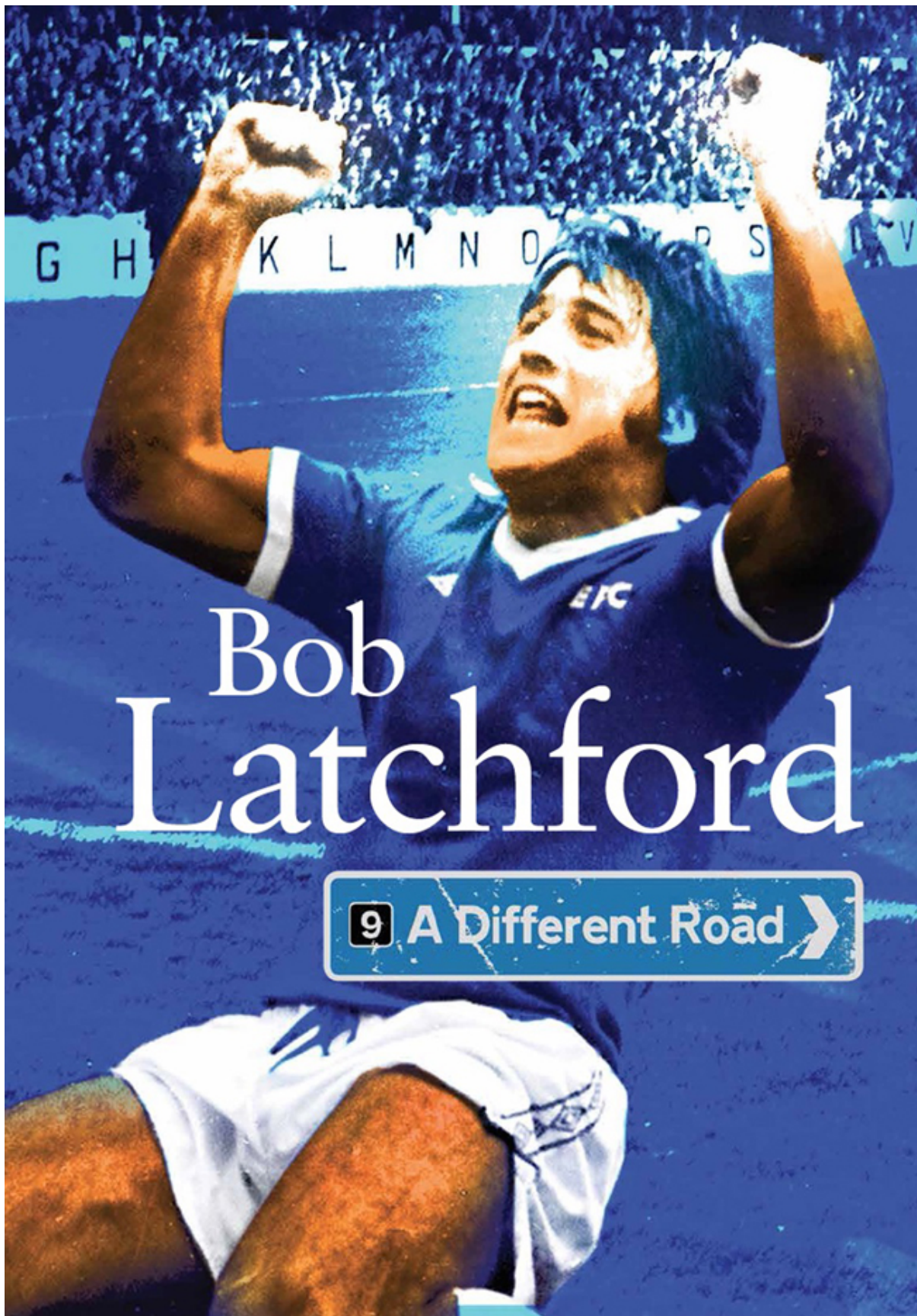


Bob Latchford

9 A Different Road





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A DIFFERENT
ROAD

BOB LATCHFORD

A DIFFERENT ROAD

BOB LATCHFORD
IN COLLABORATION WITH JAMES CORBETT



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FOR MY FAMILY

*As you go through life it's a long, long road
There'll be joys and sorrows too
As we journey on we will sing this song
For the boys in royal blue.
We're often partisan – la la la
We will journey on – la la la
Keep right on to the end of the road
Keep right on to the end
Though the way be long let your heart beat strong
Keep right on to the end
Though you're tired and weary
Still journey on 'til you come to your happy abode
With all our love we'll be dreaming of
We'll be there. Where? At the end of the road.*

– Keep Right On, Birmingham City club anthem.

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With my brothers David (left) and Peter (centre), who would also become professional footballers. (Personal collection)

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With David (left) and Peter (right, cleaning his football boots) as aspirant footballers in December 1967. David was already a young goalkeeper on the books at Birmingham City and Peter had been capped for England schools basketball team. A month later I would sign as professional with Birmingham. (Mirrorpix)

With teammate Alan Childs during a training session at St Andrews in May 1967. (Mirrorpix)

In action for Birmingham City. (Mirrorpix)

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Mersey side bound. With Pat, Izzy and Richard on the day that I signed for Everton in a British transfer record deal. *(Personal collection)*

With Billy Bingham and Everton's legendary patriarch owner, John Moores. He told me what he expected and what the club was all about. Then he went off on a tangent, telling me not to not overspend and live frugally. Who was I to question? He was one of the wealthiest men in Britain and entirely self-made. *(Mirrorpix)*

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Meeting Everton fans who drove to Milan in a minibus for our UEFA Cup game in September 1975. *(Mirrorpix)*

With my eldest two children, Richard (aged 5) and Isobel (aged 7), in August 1976. *(Mirrorpix)*

With Mick Lyons at the end of the League Cup Final match at Wembley against Aston Villa in March 1977. *(Mirrorpix)*

With Stoke goalkeeper Peter Shilton at the Victoria Ground in February 1977. Everton should have broken the bank to sign him. He would have been the difference between Everton being a team of nearly men and one of winners. *(Mirrorpix)*

With the immortal Dixie Dean, who taught me what it meant to be an Everton number nine. In that sense he was one of the most important people I encountered in my Everton career. *(Personal collection)*

On my way to 30 league goals. In action during the League Division One match against Manchester United at Old Trafford in March 1978, in which I scored both Everton goals in a 2-1 away win. (*Mirrorpix*)

I always knew I would score the two necessary goals in Everton's fateful match against Chelsea at the end of the 1977/78 season to reach my tally of 30 league goals. When Everton were awarded a late penalty there were no nerves. At the referee's whistle, I blasted the ball with my right foot. The roar of the Gwladys Street signalled that I'd fulfilled my task. I ran to the fans and sank to my knees. Fans and players raced towards me. I'd done it. (*Everton FC*)

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A final Everton salvo. After scoring a hat trick against Crystal Palace in September 1980 I'm congratulated by Steve McMahon. Soon after injury practically brought an end to my Everton career. (*Mirrorpix*)

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Scoring against FC Twente in March 1984 (*Press Association*)

I was aware of Newport's severe financial problems before I arrived, but perhaps hadn't appreciated the sheer scale of them. The whole place looked like it was on its knees, on its last legs. Two years later they went out of business. (*Mirrorpix*)

Scoring Merthyr's first goal in the 1987 Welsh Cup Final. Three Welsh Cup winner medals (tvvo for Swansea) were my only silverware of a two decade career. (*Mirrorpix*).

Working in PR for Ladbrokes in 1995. An enjoyable and unexpected role that put me back in touch with football.

With my wife of three decades, Pat, who I so cruelly lost to cancer in 2000. (*Personal collection*).

With Brian Eastick at Birmingham's academy, which we started from scratch. Andrew Johnson (pictured far right) followed in my footsteps by playing for Birmingham, Eweiton and England. (*Mirrorpix*).

They say home is where your heart is and for me that is in Germany with Andrea and our children. Here I am with her, Sam and Sina; and below; with Isobel and my grandson, Marley, and his youthful uncle and aunt. (*Personal collection*).

FOREWORD

As a former footballer and captain of Everton, the two questions I get asked the most are: ‘Don’t you wish you played now, with all the money in the game?’ and then, ‘Who was your hero growing up on Merseyside?’

The answer to the first question is a simple ‘no’, as money does not define happiness and we had freedoms back then that players certainly don’t have now. Some of my best times were in the pub after Everton had won, celebrating with my teammates as well as supporters.

The answer to the second question is also very simple: ‘Can your hero be a player you actually played with?’

As a kid, I loved Jimmy Gabriel, a powerful right-half who would chuck himself into a brick wall in the name of Everton. But as I became a part of the team a new figure emerged: someone who became a close friend – someone who continues to inspire me.

I often wonder how much Bob Latchford would be worth if he was playing today. The object of football is to score goals and he did that on a consistent basis. Year after year, he was Everton’s most reliable player.

My enduring image of Bob on the football field is him arriving at the front post and throwing his entire weight behind an attempt to reach a Dave Thomas cross. Instantly, the ball would be in the back of the net and the Gwladys Street would be celebrating.

Bob scored thirty goals during the 1977/78 season and many of them seemed to arrive via the same route. For achieving his remarkable feat, Bob was rewarded with £10,000. Most people probably would have spent that on a luxury holiday but not Bob. Half of the prize money

went to the Football League Jubilee Provident Fund and the PFA, and most of the other half was divided equally between his teammates.

The gesture summed Bob up. He was the star of our team but you would never find a more sincere gentleman. Brian Labone was the last of the Corinthians but Bob was our reference point. When all seemed lost, Bob would step forward and dig us out of a hole. He was generous, kind and incredibly considerate.

When he arrived at Everton from Birmingham City, you could see straight away that he had strength and ability. It gives me goose pimples thinking of some of his greatest moments in the years that followed: the equaliser against Aston Villa at Hillsborough in the League Cup final replay; the goal against West Ham at Elland Road in the FA Cup semi-final replay. He helped create an electric atmosphere on those nights. Evertonians were singing 'Bob Latchford can walk on water'. He was our talisman. Yet Bob was so unassuming, which is strange for a hero of the terraces.

Bob was the type of person you gravitated towards. Yet he was private. Travelling home from away games, you'd find him reading a book written by an author you'd never heard of.

That was the man: gentle, quiet and absolutely brilliant.

Bob Latchford was my hero.

Mick Lyons, August 2015

INTRODUCTION

ANDALUCIA

'Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them. That only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.'

LAO TZU

THIS ROAD BEGINS IN AN UNEXPECTED OUTPOST.

In the modern grandeur of the Hotel Melia Atlantico on Andalucia's Costa de la Luz, I pause and unwind at the end of another football season.

It is May 2001 and I am fifty years old. For probably the only time in my life I've come away on holiday on my own. It's a break after a busy year that I've needed and looked forward to. It's a holiday that will change everything.

When you have time to yourself you have that rare window to reflect on your life that has passed and your life still to come.

Over the course of a decade, from the early 1970s until the early 1980s, no player scored more First Division goals than I did. I lived the dream of a thousand schoolboys. I played and starred for the club I'd supported as a boy – Birmingham City – lining up alongside my own brother, David, on match days. I scored goals, lots of them, and helped elevate Birmingham to their rightful status in the First Division. In Trevor Francis I played alongside the most thrilling prodigy English football had seen in a generation. I was a hero, a local boy made good.

Then I became the most expensive player in the country. My name was in every newspaper, on TV and radio. I was a household name.

Joining Everton meant I played for one of the biggest and most prestigious names in English football. I scored even more goals, including a famous thirty-goal haul for which most Evertonians remember me. I played in Europe and represented my country, scoring in front of nearly 100,000 of my countrymen. Although it sat uncomfortably with me, to some I was an idol. People even named their children after me.

I remained playing at the highest level until my mid-thirties, unexpectedly topping the table with Swansea City, playing overseas, and encountering a couple of occasionally difficult nomadic years, before finding another trophy at the very end of my playing career. This had occurred over the course of twenty years, a long innings as a professional footballer by most standards.

I had achieved so much, encountered so many emotions and experiences, but always felt I could have managed more. With Everton I was incredibly unlucky not to win the League Championship on at least one occasion, and only bad luck stood between the club and domestic cup success while I was there. I always felt that with one trophy in our cabinet it would have acted as a catalyst for much more success, in the way that Everton's 1984 FA Cup win was a prelude to the club's dominance of English football. At both Birmingham and Swansea, had some things happened differently we too might have enjoyed major trophies. And yet, at the end of my career, I had just three medals to my name, all from winning the Welsh Cup.

My fortunes could have been contrasting had my career choices been different. I might have joined a Liverpool team on the cusp of European dominance, but I'd already agreed to go to Everton and wouldn't go back on my word. I could have signed for Aston Villa shortly before they won back-to-back league and European titles, but I could never have played for Birmingham's hated rivals. I might even have won the League Cup had I started out – as I could have done – a Wolves player, but I never fancied playing in a gold shirt. I always followed my heart and once my mind was set on something I never regretted it for a moment. As it was, I never won a trophy with an English club.

I was back in the game in 2001, back where I'd started, at St Andrew's, working for Birmingham City's academy. I felt at home, serving the club I'd grown up supporting, imparting to young players the knowledge once taught me by Stan Cullis and Freddie Goodwin, two very different and distinguished Birmingham City managers.

I had a life away from football too. The game had given me many friends, but my truest ones came from other parts of my life. I was the proud father of two children who had grown up to be well-balanced adults, successful in their careers. And yet, for all this contentment, there was a huge void in my life.



SIXTEEN MONTHS EARLIER MY WORLD HAD FALLEN IN. AFTER A four-year fight with cancer, I lost Pat, my wife and soulmate of three decades. I was bereft.

We'd gotten together when we were young and just knew that we were meant to be. By the time we were twenty our children, Isobel and Richard, had come along and we had many, many happy years. Football can be a selfish and unsociable profession, but Pat was like my backbone, looking after me and the children, taking on many of the parental responsibilities when I needed to train or rest or travel, supporting me, being my friend and companion. For all the transitoriness of football we tried to keep a regular place to live for the children and to avoid, as far as possible, the moves that can be so unsettling. In our partnership Pat was an unsung hero. I think it's fair to say that without her, I couldn't have achieved half of the things that I did.

Shortly before I returned to Birmingham City in 1996 she was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of cancer of the uterus. Cancer had always been a looming presence over her family and mine, taking both of our mothers. Their deaths were devastating, but when it's somebody you've been with for thirty years or more, it's almost incomprehensibly difficult knowing that that person only has a certain time to live.

From the start, we knew she wasn't going to live long. Some eighteen months after the initial diagnosis the oncologist told us at a check-up that he didn't expect her to live for more than six months. She defied that prognosis by more than two years. In a way we were lucky that we had as long together as we did.

There were tears and talking, but she was always a very positive, strong-willed person, and she wasn't going to give up. And she didn't. Although it might sound like a strange thing to say about being with a dying person, I have to say it's probably four of the best years we ever spent together. It was as if I rediscovered her again.

No man understands women. Not totally. I'd been with Pat for thirty-odd years when she was diagnosed with cancer and I didn't totally understand her. But over those four years, it was like a little window opened up into her world and I started to understand her a little bit more, a little bit better, than the previous decades. It was a very calm period; a calm four years. Even though we knew at some point she was going to die, we were so glad of every single day that we were together. It was another day to live, and another day where I understood a little bit more. I'm not saying I totally understood her at the end of the four years, but she let me into her world.

Pat lost all her hair and had to undergo chemotherapy, but she didn't really suffer in the way that my mother did all those years ago. We travelled, we played golf, we spent a lot of time together and with the children. She had excellent care. I'd lost my mother to cancer in 1970 and saw how she went through a kind of living hell, just wasting away, but Pat, mercifully, was spared that.

She started to fade towards the end of 1999. That Christmas we spent together at home in Redditch in Worcestershire as a family and she walked down the stairs for Christmas lunch, but she couldn't get back up, I had to carry her back to bed. And from that day, Christmas Day, she never got out of bed again. Slowly all her faculties started to go, and it got to a point where she was more or less in a coma.

I lost her at the end of February 2000, early in the morning.

At the time I'm not sure if the enormity of her passing quite sank in. There's so much to do when you have a loved one who's died. The process that you have to go through, arranging the funeral, organising

probate and getting their affairs organised, is enormously lengthy. It really shields you from what's happened. I had Richard and Izzy around too; that helped. For two or three weeks after Pat had gone it never hit me. It was only after the funeral, when everybody had gone and I was alone in the house, that the feeling of absolute and utter desolation struck.



BIRMINGHAM CITY COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE SUPPORTIVE following Pat's death. Trevor Francis was in charge of the footballing side of things and Karren Brady was chief executive, and they gave me as much time as I needed plus, when I was ready to return to work, a purpose too.

I was working with Brian Eastick at Birmingham's academy. We'd started it from scratch and at the start there was really no infrastructure there. However, we had some good players like Darren Carter and Andy Johnson, who would one day follow in my footsteps in the forward line of Birmingham, Everton and England. I'd passed my UEFA B Coaching Licence and was preparing for my A Licence. Work was good, work was busy.

The 2000/01 season had been an eventful one for Birmingham. The first team had reached the First Division playoffs, but fell in the semi-final, and also the final of the League Cup, which we lost on penalties to Liverpool. We got to the end of the season and Brian said, 'You'd better have a holiday in May.' We had an under-18 tournament in northern France in June and May was the only time we had free.

I was at a bit of a loose end. I intended going on my own to play a bit of golf. I was going to go back to Majorca where I had my first holiday with Pat. Then I thought, 'No, I'll go to where we had our last holiday, Andalucia.' I booked it through a golfing company and was going to go back to the same hotel where we'd stayed. The travel agent started talking about a brand-new hotel just down the coast from there. She told me all about it and I don't know why, because I was all prepared to go back to the hotel I was at with Pat, which was much nearer the golf course, but at the last minute I went with this new hotel. I'm a

great believer in fate, but little could I have imagined then that this simple, very basic decision would change my life forever.

I was a week into a ten-day holiday when I met her. She had arrived a few days after me, travelling with a friend from her home in Austria. Her name was Andrea.

It was purely chance that we met. I'd had dinner alone and was sat in the bar afterwards, having a drink while the hotel entertainment was unleashed on the unsuspecting guests. The band were awful and I was getting ready to leave when she came over and introduced herself. She'd been having a drink with her friend at the bar and had seen me on my own. It was one of those random comings together – I would never have approached her or any other woman at that time – but we clicked from the outset.

Of course, I told her that I'd been a footballer, had played for England, and had even played in Germany a few times. It didn't mean much to her, she had little interest in football. Andrea didn't know me from Adam: over time she became more aware of who I was and what I did.

I never expected I would meet anybody else after Pat. I never thought that I would fall in love again. During that little window of my life doing anything other than relaxing and spending some time on my own was the last thing on my mind, because I was so completely focused on the tournament coming up for Birmingham's under-18s. With all these other things on my mind, the last thing I expected was to bump into a young woman who I'd spend the rest of my days with. It seemed inconceivable. It was totally the last thing on my mind.

And yet, over the course of that weekend, I realised that I wanted to be with Andrea more than anything else. I have always been big on emotional connections and through my life and through my career my heart has always ruled my head. And so it was with Andrea. I fell in love with her very easily and very quickly. I suppose, looking back, I was still a bit vulnerable, emotionally anyway; I probably wasn't quite through my grieving over Pat. But there comes a time to move on and start living again. That was that moment.

We both felt the need to be together. We felt the need for clean breaks with our pasts. We decided to both get away from the areas that

we lived in and try something new. Neither England nor Germany were in our minds.

For me, this would almost certainly mean turning my back on football, a game I'd served virtually continuously as a professional since the age of seventeen.

Professionally, I was in a good place in 2001. I was working for Birmingham, my boyhood club, then under the management of my friend and former teammate Trevor Francis. I liked and respected my colleagues. The head of the academy, Brian Eastick, who I worked with most closely, was technically the most accomplished coach I'd encountered in football. In David Sullivan and David Gold we had ambitious owners who were targeting the Premier League at a time when money was flooding through the game.

I knew that if I remained at Birmingham I would be well looked after. Maybe I'd share in some of the reflected glory of being at a club in the most powerful and watched league in world football. Maybe I could be part of turning Birmingham into a force in English football. As a boy on the St Andrew's terraces I'd watched them play in front of 50,000 crowds, taking on the likes of Barcelona and Inter Milan, and appearing in European and domestic finals. Maybe I could be part of reclaiming these days, part of a resurrection?

Or maybe not.

I loved football. The game gave me some great experiences and moments I will never forget. For my entire life it had been a good living. It was – and remains – a passion, but it was never all-consuming. It was a job, whereas life is life and there for living, not serving an employer.

So, at the age of 50, I turned my back on the game. I chose to go with Andrea. I left my job, my club, my home city, my country, my profession. I chose a different road.



THIS IS THE STORY OF MY LIFE UP UNTIL NOW. I'VE WAITED MANY years to sit down and work on it, in part because I view my life

as a journey – not a string of happenings and anecdotes – and it goes on, deviating, surprising and delighting.

When I consider my life I always think of the nursery rhyme ‘Monday’s Child’, which tells us, ‘Thursday’s child has far to go’. Well, I was that Thursday child. I’m still going; I don’t know where, and I’ve never really been in total control of my destiny. I’ve always gone down these different junctions and avenues before resuming my course. But while the road continues – and will continue for some years yet, I hope – I realise that now, in my 65th year, the time is as right as it ever has been to provide a testimony so that future generations of football fans and my family can look back at and understand the times I lived and played in. I hope this will show my true character and provide an understanding of my person and the decisions that I made on my life’s journey. I’ve waited many years to share it; I hope you enjoy reading just how I came to be.

KINGS NORTON

*'Having somewhere to go is home, having someone to love is family,
having both is a blessing.'*

UNKNOWN

THE JOURNEY BEGINS IN JANUARY 1951 IN LOVEDAY STREET IN THE middle of Birmingham, home of the city's maternity hospital. I was a baby-boomer, the third of four boys born to Reg and Ada Latchford, in a happy and busy working-class family in Kings Norton, south of Birmingham. John, my oldest brother, is a decade older. He was followed by David in 1949, then myself and, two years later, Peter. I don't think either of my parents could have imagined in their wildest dreams that within a generation their boys would make up one of the most prominent families in English football.

These were difficult years of reconstruction and recovery for the whole country. I was born into an era of austerity and rationing. Birmingham was still very much Britain's second city, and while the heartbeat of Britain's age of Victorian reform had suffered terribly from German bombing raids, the harsh post-war reconstruction of brutalist architecture and city-centre motorways from which its reputation suffered in the latter years of the twentieth century was still to be fully imposed. It was a pleasant place to live, to grow up.

Dad worked at Moneyhul Hall Road Mental Hospital, where he was Assistant Chief Male Nurse. With 1950s standards of mental health

care, it was probably a bit like a *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*-type place. But as boys we used to go in there and roam around, because they had a big playing area and a field on which we used to play football as well as cricket. When you consider institutions of the era that had dubious reputations, the facilities were fantastic. Seeing some of the patients was certainly a bit of an education.

My father could be quite strait-laced at times. He was probably the most honest man that I ever knew. He simply wouldn't utter a dishonest word; he was incapable of doing so. If something happened a certain way he wouldn't try and hedge the truth or put his angle on it, he'd tell it the way that it was. One of the things he always said was, 'You make your bed, you lie in it.' It was his famous quote and I always associate it with him. Get on with things, whatever happens. It wasn't a bad philosophy to have.

Physically he was quite an imposing man; he was lean, muscular, six-foot-three tall at a time when there probably weren't too many people of that stature. You wouldn't want to argue with my dad. He had a very easy temperament about him, although – a little like me – he could snap or explode. I remember John, my eldest brother, saying something he didn't like when he was seventeen or eighteen and my dad pinning him up against the wall – John would have been six-foot-two himself – and very quietly telling him the way things were in his house. You didn't cross my father; you didn't do anything out of turn, otherwise he'd lay down the law. We came from a generation where corporal punishment was the norm.

We all loved and respected him, irrespective of whether we got the odd clip around the backside. I would say that his values – being respectful, honest, true to yourself – were engrained in all of us. He had lots of interest in sport – which rubbed off on all of us – and loved fishing, which held less interest for me. He'd fish local rivers in Worcestershire, Warwickshire and sometimes faraway places, like East Anglia or Wales.

Mum was of Irish stock and her own mother had immigrated to the Small Heath area of Birmingham at the start of the century. I know very little about my mother's side of the family. She had four uncles,

and my middle name, Dennis, is after one of them. Uncle Dennis was a bit of a tearaway by all accounts and apparently liked to drink, and fight. Every Friday and Saturday night he'd be out with his mates, having a pint, and then invariably ended up in a scrap. One night it went too far and somebody was killed. He and his mates were hauled up in front of the judge and slung into prison. The year happened to be 1914, the outbreak of the Great War, and they gave him the choice of fighting or staying in jail. He decided to fight for the British Army, which was not a good decision. One day he put his head above the trench and had it blown off. I'm not really sure why I was named after him; I hope it wasn't a prophetic choice!

Ours wasn't a religious household. We are all baptised in the Church of England but we weren't church-goers and not particularly religious. It was a normal working-class background, but we never wanted for anything. Dad had a good job, but he was definitely working class, a proud Labour supporter. Brian Viner described me in his book about Everton in the 1970s as being a middle-class boy, but I don't know why he thought that; I must have given him the wrong impression.

Mum had her hands full with my brothers and me. She'd always wanted a girl; that was the big thing in her life. Before she died in 1970 from cancer I fathered a daughter, Isobel – known as Izzy – and she was absolutely thrilled at finally having a girl in the family. When we were growing up she cleaned other people's houses for a bit of pocket money, and worked as a school dinner lady. I think she had enough on her plate with us boys. She struggled at times with four kids and even when John left home she probably struggled with three of us. We could be wild and there were times when we made her life hell. Dinner time was fight time, scrapping to protect your food, otherwise it would be gone. But she never gave up; she was of that era where you didn't. She and my dad had to be like that. They'd gone through the war, rationing and austerity. To baby-boomers like my brothers and myself those experiences still seemed fresh to everyone.

I think becoming a father for the second time over the past decade or so has made me realise just how hard it was for her back then. When my eldest two children, Izzy and Richard, were young in the early 1970s I was away a lot and preoccupied with my career, and my wife

Pat took on a lot of the parenting responsibilities. Second time around I'm at home a lot more and would almost consider myself a 'full-time dad'. You can't imagine how hard a job it is unless you do it 24/7. One child is hard enough; two children is difficult; three or four, or more, I don't know how you'd do it and, looking back, I'm not quite sure how Mum coped. I wouldn't want to do it. You really can't rest because every waking minute is occupied. No government can pay families enough money to do the job properly. Parenting really is the hardest job and it's now, later in my life, when I fully recognise just how hard my Mum had it with the four of us.

Family life had its rhythms and routines in the 1950s and the Latchford home was probably not dissimilar to millions of households across the country. I think the only time we had meat was on a Sunday; we always had a Sunday roast, with a dessert afterwards. We had tea later on, with jelly and blancmange; that was always the big thing – Sunday roast and the Sunday tea. There'd be spam fritters and beans on toast during the week, or we'd be given money to visit the fish and chip shop up the road.

There was an extended family network in and around Birmingham. Three of my grandparents were still alive when I was growing up and my dad's sister, my Auntie Mary, who worked at the same hospital as him, lived locally and was often around. She would give us pocket money and sweets; although she remained a spinster, she was a very active woman and left a big impression on me. She would go off on holidays all over Europe during the 1950s, which was practically unheard of at the time, and come back and wow us with photographs of the Alps or France.

Dad and Auntie Mary grew up in the shadow of St Andrew's, so Birmingham City was in the blood and the family heritage. My father always said that his own father used to go and drink with the owners of Birmingham City Football Club, the Morris's, and knew them well. Harry Morris had captained the club before going on to become chairman and develop St Andrew's; his sons Harry and Len served the club for decades as chairman and director. They were of the people.

Although my dad took a great interest in sport and fishing, my parents had no real sporting background in terms of participation. My