

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Cliff

Tim Ewbank & Stafford Hildred

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About the Book

'My name is Harry. I am 12. My ambition is to be a famous star one day.'

Cliff, in a letter to a penpal in Australia

Fifty years ago Cliff Richard gave his first ever performance. It was the beginning of an extraordinary career that saw him become one of the best-loved stars of all time.

Now Cliff's half-century in the spotlight is captured in this definitive biography. From his childhood in India and teenage years in Cheshunt to his rapid rise to stardom, his religious beliefs and his enduring popularity, discover Cliff as he was then and as he is today. Featuring interviews with fellow musicians, co-stars, directors and Cliff himself, it is a fascinating insight into the life of one of our most beloved icons.

Tim Ewbank and Stafford Hildred are showbusiness writers whose previous books include bestselling biographies of Sir David Jason and Rod Stewart.

CLIFF

An Intimate Portrait of a Living Legend

Tim Ewbank
and
Stafford Hildred



Tim: To my mother Joy, Emma and Oliver
Stafford: To Janet, Claire and Rebecca

PROLOGUE

THE LOUD CROWING of a lusty young cockerel is far and away Cliff Richard's favourite first sound of the day. As soon as he hears that distinctive call, he knows the sun will soon be rising over the Atlantic Ocean and bringing new life to the acres of beautifully kept vineyards surrounding the elegant farmhouse that is the singer's home in Portugal.

He silently registers relief that he is not incarcerated in yet another luxury hotel in any of the world's great cities facing a busy day in boardroom or studio - or even at home in grey old England.

'Portugal has a peaceful feel about it,' Cliff said. 'I sit on the kitchen terrace overlooking the vineyard and I feel cut off from the world. I need that sort of thing, and when I come back I'm really ready to work again. I find a great peace in the Algarve. In Portugal I can live like a recluse for a couple of weeks. I don't go out much and there's no need to shave. There are times when I need to withdraw and be ordinary.'

Cliff did not know that Portugal was Britain's oldest ally when he settled on the very edge of Europe, but it's an association he thoroughly approves of.

Ever since he took a holiday in Portugal in 1961, Cliff has enjoyed a love affair with the Algarve. He was delighted to discover the natural beauty of its unspoiled and then undeveloped coastline and soon bought a villa in Albufeira as a holiday home. The simplicity of the coastal life appealed to his yearning for peace and harmony as a counterbalance to the hectic life of the world's most

durable rock 'n' roll star. Here, for once, he could anonymously join locals on fishing expeditions or dine in little restaurants unpestered and unrecognised, even when he brought out a guitar and sang.

In all, Cliff has owned three separate homes in the Algarve down the years, the latest of which is a beautiful and enchanting farm-cum-winery that he bought in 1991. The farmhouse is over 250 years old, and the vineyards surrounding it afford the maximum privacy the singer craves.

Usually the cockerel will wake Cliff at five in the morning, and in the early morning light he will venture out on to the terrace simply to gaze over the vineyards and revel in the tranquillity of the oasis of calm he has created for himself.

As a committed Christian, many's the time Cliff has sat on this terrace and pondered how fortunate he is and how far he has come. He's been knighted by the Queen, he's a friend of the Prime Minister, his success as a singer and entertainer are unmatched, and it's all a far cry from the days when he and his mother, father and three sisters existed – lived is too rich a word – in poverty in just one room in Surrey when they first came to England from India.

'It's aeons apart when I think of my humble background,' he recently conceded to his good friend, the broadcaster Gloria Hunniford, when she visited Cliff in Portugal to make a TV programme about him. 'But it's good to have the memory.'

'To remember what it was like in the past stops you taking everything for granted. It's important to have a memory of what it was like, and still is for an awful lot of people. They can all come out of it, as I came out of mine, but I like being able to remember so clearly what it was like in those early days.'

Cliff will be 67 on 14 October 2007, and it's 50 years since Harry Webb, as he was then known, joined Dick Teague's Skiffle Group on 20 September 1957, and took his

first steps on a career that is unparalleled in British showbusiness.

Today, as he approaches this career milestone, Cliff ranks as far and away the most successful British recording artist, with fourteen UK number-one singles, and record sales that total in excess of 260 million. Incredibly, he has spent a total of more than 20 years in the charts. He is British pop's most celebrated survivor, the only British rock 'n' roll star to ride successfully the changing musical trends over the years – rock 'n' roll, Merseybeat, glam rock, heavy metal, punk rock and rap.

Cliff has outlasted every trend with a sincerity and a commitment that is unequalled in his field. Throughout his decades in the charts, Cliff has displayed a valiant longevity. He has even been able to parody one of his earliest hits, 'Living Doll', with the comedy quartet the Young Ones and still register yet another number-one hit.

He's appeared in musicals like *Time* and *Heathcliff*, sung on gospel tours, and celebrated his 50th birthday with a move into social commentary with the anti-war hit *From a Distance*. Memorably, he even took it upon himself to stage an impromptu performance at the 1996 Wimbledon tennis championships to cheer up the crowd during a miserably prolonged rain-break. This spontaneous act endeared him to millions.

'There's never been anybody like him, and there never will be,' said Bruce Welch, his old friend and guitarist from his backing group The Shadows. 'He's had a hundred and thirty-six hits over fifty years, he's a massive star and all he's known is success.

'He's still out there performing, he's still hungry for it, and he still wants to be top of the tree. He has an enormous ego. An ego that drives him forward in anything he's doing. He's convinced when he makes a single that he's competing with Westlife or Robbie Williams, people forty years younger than him.

‘But he’s very contented inside. He does exactly what he wants, and works when he wants.’

It is Cliff’s great sadness that his father, who died when Cliff was twenty, did not live long enough to see his extraordinary success. ‘My father would have loved the knighthood and the OBE,’ he said, ‘the open-air concerts at castles and stately homes and seasons at the Albert Hall. I know he would have done.’

But, to Cliff, it is perhaps an even greater tragedy that in recent years his mother Dorothy, the one woman the age-defying bachelor boy has loved beyond any other throughout his life, has missed his continuing success after cruelly falling victim to dementia.

Many stars try to hide their personal tragedies, or at least shy away from speaking about them, but with his typical frankness Cliff bravely speaks out about how he ‘lost’ the mother he loved so much in the mid-1990s.

‘She has always been the yardstick by which I’ve made all my decisions,’ he has said. ‘At the back of my mind there’s always been the thought: “What would Mum think?”’

‘I remember once when I appeared on stage wearing a dinner jacket, Lycra shorts and matching waistcoat, and I thought I looked terrific. But Mum called me and told me I looked like a punk. It really upset me.

‘That’s what I miss about her now,’ said Cliff when his mother’s dementia took hold. ‘The only people who can clip you down are your parents. They’re the only ones who can get away with it. Even now, when Mum’s not well, I still feel that I’m accountable to her and I measure what I do by how she would react.’

Dorothy would be proud to know that her son would be celebrating 50 years at the top. She was the one who always had faith in Cliff right from the word go. She was the one who also advised Cliff not to get married.

Cliff Richard remains a single man, but far from lonely. He has many great, long-lasting friends. But as he sits

alone with his thoughts in the early Portuguese sunlight, it's perhaps easier to understand why Bruce Welch once summed him up thus: 'He's only got Cliff Richard to think about. He's looked in the mirror since he was seventeen - he was a big star at seventeen - and all he's had to think about every day is: how good am I looking today?

'He's the biggest box-office draw in this country bar anybody. He got knighted for his work for charity and for leading a blameless life. No one's ever caught him out. And I don't think anyone ever will.'

1. CHILDHOOD

My mother had servants working for her so that somebody bathed me, someone else fed us all, and so it was all pretty good.

Cliff on his early years living in India

CLIFF RICHARD WAS born Harry Rodger Webb in the King's English Hospital in Lucknow, India, on 14 October 1940. Weighing in at a healthy nine pounds, baby Harry was a much treasured first-born child for Rodger and Dorothy Webb, who had married in West Bengal some eighteen months earlier.

Rodger, who was born in Burma to English parents, and Dorothy Dazely, the young woman who was to become his wife, had arrived in India from very different backgrounds. Rodger's relatives had come to India as part of a taskforce to build a railway system, while Dorothy's English parents had left the mother country on military grounds, her father being a regular soldier.

The couple first met in 1936 when Rodger paid a visit to his sister in the town of Asansol. Pretty teenager Dorothy just happened to live in the apartment below. Dorothy was then only sixteen and Rodger was almost twice her age at thirty-one, but he was immediately captivated by Dorothy's dark, blossoming good looks and pleasant personality, while she quickly warmed to his confident, man-of-the-world approach to life.

For Dorothy, the fifteen-year age difference was not the only hindrance to any idea of romance: Rodger lived a long

way from her. But the couple remained in touch, mainly by letter, and the relationship grew steadily more serious. Eventually they married on 26 April 1939, when Dorothy was nineteen.

By now, Rodger had worked his way up to become the area manager for Kellner's, a well-known catering company. Kellner's had the lucrative contract for the Indian railways and Rodger ran the restaurant cars for the Bengal-Nagpur railway. A welcome perk of the job for the Webbs was the provision by the company of an apartment above a chocolate factory in Howrah, a busy, congested town just outside Calcutta.

Rodger's job involved plenty of travel around the country from Howrah's huge railway station, which had rail connections to most of the major cities and towns in India.

He was delighted to be able to come back from his frequent business trips away to a young wife cheerfully ensconced in a well-appointed apartment with black-and-white marble floors and a team of servants at her beck and call. The Second World War might have been raging across the globe, but the horrors of the fighting seemed a long, long way away.

When he was old enough, young Harry attended the local Church of England school, St Thomas's in Church Road, an educational establishment that enjoyed the benefit of generously sized grounds ringed by banana trees.

As was customary for children of English families enjoying a colonial lifestyle, Cliff's school lunch was personally hand-delivered every day to the school by one of the Webbs' four servants. Habib, one of two kitchen staff responsible for cooking and serving meals for the family, would arrive each day with an armful of food for Cliff's delectation, the plates carefully wrapped in crisp white napkins, neatly knotted at the top.

'My mother and father had a very fine, high-profile lifestyle,' Cliff said. 'Because the British in India had good

jobs there, my father made good money. We had an apartment that we didn't have to pay for provided by his company, my mother had servants working for her so that somebody bathed me, someone else fed us all, and so it was all pretty good.'

Other than the prandial pampering, Cliff's memories of his early schooldays are sketchy. He learned to speak a smattering of Hindi and Bengali, but his chief memory is of being utterly intrigued by a nature lesson, when he found he could encourage mango seeds to grow by placing them on soggy blotting paper. This simple classroom experiment demonstrating the wonders of botany elicited wide-eyed enthrallment as the seeds began to sprout. It instilled in the little boy a fascination with the growing of plants generally, which has stayed with Cliff all his life, manifested most notably in his enthusiasm for the grapes that grow so fruitfully on his sixteen-acre vineyard in Portugal.

Away from the classroom, one of Cliff's favourite – typically boyish – outdoor pursuits was fishing in a nearby lake with his dad. Father and son would sit by the water with monkeys playing in the trees overhead and Cliff would try to make a catch with a homemade rod comprising a bamboo stick with a bent pin jammed in the end.

Another much enjoyed game was taking part in kite-flying battles with his pals. For youngsters in India, flying a kite was more than just a popular pastime – it was almost an art form. The skill was not in getting the kite airborne – most boys could manage that – but in deftly manipulating the strings to make it swoop on to your rival's kite and slice through his cotton controls with the aid of slivers of glass cunningly concealed in the tail of your own kite. Cliff developed a winning technique, which would leave an opponent's severed kite soaring into the sky on the wind, never to be seen again, thanks to a swift swoop and snip of the cotton strand.

Every Sunday morning the Webb family attended St Thomas's church, where Cliff had been christened. The church was sited next to the school and the young male pupils were expected to provide the treble section for the church choir. Cliff was no exception and, in his red cassock and white ruff, he was the apple of his mother's eye.

The choir provided an early introduction to music for Cliff, and at home there was also a wind-up gramophone, complete with ornate horn, to enjoy records bought mainly by Dorothy. A special favourite of Cliff's was an obscure ditty called 'Chewing a Piece of Straw' to which he liked singing along. 'Ragtime Cowboy Joe' and Glenn Miller's 'Jersey Bounce' were other numbers that caught his ear. There were also visits to look forward to from an uncle who sang to his own guitar but, young as he was, Cliff realised Uncle Tom sang and played more with unbridled enthusiasm than any marked musical dexterity or vocal ability. But the early lesson that music was to be enjoyed was certainly well received.

For a happy little child like Cliff, adored by his parents and waited on hand and foot by servants, life seemed rosy enough. But the winds of change had for some time been blowing through India and, on the stroke of midnight on 24 August 1947, the sun finally set on the British Raj after 163 momentous years. British rule of India came to an end and two new dominions, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were created, separate from India. It was the end of an extraordinary era, and life on the subcontinent was never to be the same again.

The Webbs had, of course, long known that 'Home Rule' was approaching and, like the many other British families in India, they viewed it with apprehension and no little alarm when its advent was increasingly punctuated by Hindu versus Muslim riots.

The partition of India far from guaranteed inter-religious peace between followers of the two faiths and, nine days after India gained her independence, ten thousand died in border clashes in the Punjab. A train full of Muslim refugees from Delhi bound for the safety of Pakistani territory was ambushed and twelve hundred were massacred in the worst single incident of slaughter.

On one occasion, after gunshots were heard at the end of the street, the unrest was serious enough for Cliff and his sister Donna to spend the night at an aunt's for their own safety. Cliff always looked forward to visiting his aunt because she allowed him to eat curry and rice with his hands, as was the Indian custom. Rodger Webb was a rigid stickler for good manners and he would never have permitted this at home.

Cliff and the rest of his family later witnessed first hand a shocking sectarian clash when a terrified young Muslim boy fleeing for his life took refuge in a next-door garden to escape some Hindus hellbent on violence.

From their apartment window the Webbs could see the boy cowering next to a wall and felt compelled to help. Over several days they regularly lowered food down to him once darkness had fallen, thus allowing their act of human compassion to remain undetected. To have been seen helping the boy might have invited trouble.

When Rodger Webb was finally convinced that the lad's hiding place had not been pinpointed by his enemies, he helped him over the wall and into a truck, where he was escorted to safety by some of the Webbs' Muslim servants. Eventually, the Webbs' servants themselves deemed it prudent to head for safer surroundings as well. Much as he was sad to see them go, Rodger took it upon himself to drive them to safety.

Religious feuds were a constant worry, but there were also other serious issues to consider for British ex-patriots. After India gained its independence, British families

became obvious targets for retaliation from those who deeply resented India's years of subservience and kowtowing to its white masters. Incidents of Britons being pelted with stones and worse became all too frequent for comfort for families like the Webbs.

One day, while Dorothy was out shopping with Cliff by her side, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by a group of Indians who jostled and jeered at them. The situation threatened to turn ugly when the leader of the group aggressively shouted: 'Why don't you go home to your own country, white woman?' Cliff bravely piped up: 'That's my mummy, leave my mummy alone.' He was too young to understand fully the gravity of that confrontation, although he could not fail to discern the effect it had upon his mother. Dorothy was distinctly unnerved – even more so when soon afterwards, during an Indian festival, several white women were drenched with jets of coloured water normally reserved for special effects for the local fountains on festival days.

Back in the safety of their apartment, Dorothy resolved that the family must make urgent plans to pack up and leave. It was a far from easy decision, because India was the only life she had ever known and the family she and her husband would be uprooting by now numbered five. Cliff had two younger sisters, Donella and Jacqueline, who were safely delivered after Dorothy's second child, a baby boy, had died at birth.

Another good reason to seek a new life in another country was Rodger's dwindling income. In India, his catering job had relied to a great extent on the wine trade, but when prohibition came in, he had found himself hitting hard times.

But where could they go? That was the burning question. Whatever their destination, it would be a huge step into the unknown. Eventually the choice boiled down to two alternatives on opposite sides of the world: England or

Australia. Neither Dorothy, who had lived all her life in India, nor Rodger had ever been to England. Rodger was very tempted by Australia because he had a friend who was heading Down Under and was ready to form a business with him there. So keen was the friend for Rodger to join him in Australia that he was even prepared to pay Rodger's fare.

But Dorothy put her foot down. She insisted that they must try for a new life in England, where at least they had relatives they could stay with initially while they found somewhere to settle. Rodger eventually agreed, a boat passage was duly booked for the five of them, and the Webbs set about selling the possessions they could not fit into their limited baggage allowance or would have no use for in their new life.

In August 1948, almost a year to the day after India had gained her independence, the Webb family tearfully bid farewell to their friends and set off with their possessions packed into five suitcases.

The first leg of their exodus comprised a three-day train journey to Bombay before boarding the P & O ship *SS Ranghi* for a three-week voyage to England, during which Cliff quickly discovered he was horribly prone to seasickness. He spent the first few days in the cabin, throwing up and feeling desperately ill, until his father took him up on deck for some air and walked him around to get used to the pitch and roll of the ship.

Finally, early one crisp Monday morning in mid-September, the *SS Ranghi* tied up at Tilbury, the docks that regularly operated as London's passenger-liner terminal until the 1960s.

Stepping down the gangway on to British soil for the first time, Rodger Webb was a worried man. He had arrived in England with a wife and young family and he had precisely £5 in his pocket.

He was too proud a man to show his concern, but inwardly he feared for his family's all too uncertain future. He was now 48 years old, starting life anew in a country totally alien to him, and needing to find a job fast to feed his wife and three young children.

Surely never in his wildest imagination could he have imagined that, some ten years later, the cheerful little boy standing nervously beside him, gazing inquisitively up at the steel cranes towering above him on Tilbury's dockside, would take this new country's youth by storm.

2. CHESHUNT

I thought he was too nice for the showbusiness rat race.

Jay Norris, Cliff's teacher at Cheshunt Secondary Modern
School

IT'S NOT HARD to imagine just how traumatic the Webbs found their transition to post-war England after enjoying the colonial luxury of ayahs and servants in India. The family experienced a staggering culture shock that impacted deeply on each member.

Prior to their arrival, Cliff's grandmother had the unenviable job of sorting out accommodation for the family and on the very tightest of budgets. It was no easy task, because men returning to Britain from the forces after the war were still searching for somewhere to live and housing was allocated on a system of points. All Dorothy's mother managed to find them was a single box room next door to her own home at 47 Windborough Road, Carshalton, Surrey.

All five members of the Webb family somehow crammed into this one room, which had to serve as a communal dormitory complete with chamber pots, as well as being both living room and kitchen. Cliff slept on a mattress on the floor head to toe with his eldest sister Donna. After the spacious and comfortable trappings of life in India, Dorothy, in particular, found the constant humiliation and grim practicalities of living cheek by jowl in a single room desperately hard to take.

There was never a single second of privacy for any of them, not even for the tears Dorothy frequently shed over her family's predicament. Lying on one of the mattresses laid out on the floor at night, Cliff could not fail to hear his mother's pitiful sobs in the darkness as she mourned the life her family had lost.

'When we arrived we didn't have any money for anything,' Cliff said, 'not even food. I can remember that three times a week our main meal would be two slices of bread with sugar sprinkled on it, no butter, and all the tea we could drink. We weren't starving, but I was always hungry and used to dream about food. Of course things did gradually become a little easier, but even then we never had any money. If ever there was a refund on the electric meter, then Dad would share out a little between me and my three sisters. If the refund was £1, then all of us would be given sixpence.'

On a practical level, life for Dorothy was challenging. In India, the cooking, the washing of the family's clothes, ironing, cleaning and countless other household chores, were all left to the servants. Now, in addition to looking after her three children herself without the domestic help to which she had become accustomed, Dorothy had to learn to cook on a hastily acquired little green primus stove. She quickly learned to prepare porridge for breakfast so she could send the family off to work and school with something filling in their stomachs. She also set about doing the family washing by hand in the bathroom sink. In those days there were no launderettes - the opening of London's first at 184 Bayswater on a six-month trial was still a couple of years away - and a washing machine was still something of a rarity in British homes and well beyond the Webbs' financial reach in any case.

Cliff and his family quickly discovered that the end of World War Two had brought peace but not plenty to England and its people. Faced with a mounting financial

crisis, the British government had recently announced new austerity cuts to add to the rationing of food, clothes, petrol and tobacco, which had been in force for many years as part of the war effort. The new cuts included a stop on motoring for pleasure and a ban on foreign holidays.

To add to the family's gloomy start in England, within weeks of their arrival the country was enveloped by the worst fog in many years, leading to three train crashes, and buses and police cars being taken off the road. And for the very first time, Christmas brought no cheer for the family. They were in such dire financial straits that there were no presents to be handed out. The onset of winter made the family yearn for the warmth of India.

For Rodger Webb, the chief priority was to get a job. But with food scarce and ration books in force, the chances of using the extensive railway catering experience he had gained in India to land a similar worthwhile job were almost non-existent. While he searched for some sort of employment, the family initially lived largely on the charity and kindness of relatives. Rodger was grateful, but frustrated that they were forced to rely on the generosity of others for their survival.

Resigned to their temporary one-room existence, Cliff's parents were naturally keen to see their son settled into a local school as soon as possible. The family had arrived just after the start of the autumn term for English schools and Cliff was quickly enrolled at Stanley Park Primary School in Carshalton. He had enjoyed going to school in India, but now his parents were horrified to find their precious son frequently coming home from school battered, bruised, bloodied and in floods of tears.

A classroom can be a cruel place for children who don't fit in, and Cliff stood out from the others because of the colour of his skin. Seven years in India had given him a deep tropical tan, which contrasted sharply with the pallor

of the suburban Carshalton schoolkids raised on a less-than-nourishing diet during the war.

To the ignorant eyes of some of the primary school youngsters, Cliff's dark skin marked him out as a 'wog', as they chose to call him. And the singsong lilt in his voice, which he'd acquired while in India, only seemed to confirm to the playground bullies that he was a 'nigger'.

When Cliff volunteered the information that he had come to the UK from India, the bullies teased and taunted him with Apache-style war whoops and quizzed him as to why he wasn't wearing a feather headdress and carrying a tomahawk. 'Indie-bum' or 'Red Indian Harry' they called him, despite Cliff taking pains to try and get it into their skulls that Red Indians did not come from Calcutta.

'Right from the moment that I arrived at Stanley Park Primary School in September 1948 I was bullied and taunted mercilessly,' Cliff recalled. 'I was one month short of my eighth birthday, I'd enjoyed a wonderful childhood and then all of a sudden I was being called a wog and a nigger. The bullies would keep asking where my tepee was.

'I had a lot of fights at school,' said Cliff, who likened himself to a terrier fighting an Alsatian when he was forced to take on the bigger boys. 'When I first moved from India to England I obviously had a great tan and I got called Indie-bum and all that. It's just ridiculous really, but I fought a lot at school. I came home bruised and in tears sometimes, but I always gave as good as I got. I was little, but I always won.

'I can just remember being bullied all the time and I seemed to be fighting in every break between classes. It was a constant battle, but in spite of what picture people may have of me, I wouldn't back down.

'After a while I became very good at fighting. I remember having one child pinned to the ground, and I was so angry with him that I rubbed his wrist into the tarmac until it tore away his skin and he was bleeding quite profusely. But even

after that, it didn't stop, and even the teachers would make remarks that they could never get away with today.'

Scarcely a day went by without Cliff being involved in a fight. The terrible treatment left Cliff with a lifelong hatred of discrimination.

On the way home, discretion was the wiser part of valour for Cliff. The bullies followed him, taunting him all the way, but he didn't want to be seen having fights in front of his family. However, if the clashes ended in punch-ups and he was forced to stand his ground, Cliff was always prepared to put up his fists.

The constant sniping and jeering of his tormentors made Cliff's early schooldays miserable. He decided that he hated England, hated the nasty boys who chased him and hated trying to work out pounds, shillings and pence. Rupees had been so much easier.

It took him a long time before he was able to forget the verbal abuse he had suffered – especially when one of his teachers cruelly weighed in with an offensive remark in front of the whole class about 'Harry and his wigwam'.

Cliff was shocked and hurt by such insensitivity from an adult and a schoolteacher to boot, but he reckons the bullying, taunts and fighting pulled his family ever closer. 'It made me very sceptical of other people,' he said. 'It was like us and the rest of the world. It meant that I was never part of a group of friends. I just felt different.'

After a year, however, he was able to leave the bullies of Stanley Park Primary School behind. The Webbs decided they had been reliant for long enough on Cliff's granny and Rodger felt it would be prudent to move from Carshalton, where there was a five-year waiting list for council houses. The chance to move came when an aunt kindly offered them a room in her own home in Waltham Cross, situated in the Lea Valley on the north-east Essex outskirts of London. Importantly, Waltham Cross had only a two-year waiting list for a council house.

The one room in Carshalton next to Granny had been cramped enough for five. But the aunt's room was not much bigger, and space was soon at even more of a premium when Dorothy gave birth to Joan, a third little sister for Cliff.

It was with considerable difficulty that all six members of the Webb family now struggled to make a life for themselves within the confines of four walls. Cliff can remember that when his feet grew to be the same size as his mother's, the two of them would share one pair of Wellington boots between them in order to save buying another pair. It was one way of saving cash, but it meant that, in wet weather, either Dorothy pulled on the boots to go out and Cliff remained indoors or vice versa.

After many depressing months without employment, Rodger finally landed a factory job with Ferguson's, a well-established TV and radio manufacturer, nearby in Enfield. It was a huge relief for everyone. 'He would have died rather than go on the dole,' said Cliff of his father. 'He spent hours travelling to and from a job outside his area rather than be out of work.'

Once baby Joan was old enough not to need constant attention, Dorothy was able to take a job at a factory in Broxbourne some five miles away to help make ends meet. Like her husband, she pedalled to work on a bicycle to save a few pence rather than pay the bus fare.

The job may have added a few much-needed shillings to the family income, but it gave Dorothy a jolting insight into British trade-union practices. One day Cliff saw his mother come home in tears because she had been sent to Coventry by her fellow factory workers. They had insisted she slow her work down so they could all get overtime pay. Dorothy declared she thought that was dishonest and paid the penalty for her altruism.

But, with some money coming in, things at last were looking up for the family and their brighter circumstances

were reflected in young Harry's improving work in the classroom at Kings Road School in Waltham Cross, which he had attended since their move from Carshalton. Cliff even won a prize for coming top of the class.

Now they had an income, Rodger and Dorothy put their names down for a council house, but without much real hope of decent council accommodation for some years. As newcomers they were bottom of the list, below those already living in the area.

But, unexpectedly, life for Cliff and his family took an important and heartening turn in the spring of 1951 when he was ten years old. A neighbour, appalled at the cramped and primitive conditions in which the Webbs were living, tipped off the local council about their plight. When a council housing officer duly arrived to investigate, he deemed them deserving of emergency treatment.

He assured Rodger and Dorothy they would be moved into a council house within two months. Considering there was a long waiting list, they were somewhat sceptical, but within a matter of weeks, in April 1951, a small, red-brick house on a council estate in Cheshunt, Herts, was made available to them as a priority.

To Cliff and his family, the new three-up, two-down residence felt like a palace after the claustrophobic confines of one-room multi-cohabitation. To the family's pleasure, they found that their new home even had a tiny garden, and the house went a long way to cementing Cliff's view that England, not India, was his home.

'Some people say: "Don't you feel your home is India because you were born there?" I say, "No." I remember what I remember. I have fond memories of being a child in India, but my family always considered England as home and that when we left India we were going home to Blighty. We arrived here and I felt I'd come home. So England will always be home. It is important to think of somewhere as being your grass roots. How can Britain not be that? It's

the place that gave me my career, my life as a young person, my education was here. I shall be eternally grateful to this country and always consider myself British.'

Number 12 Hargreaves Close, Cheshunt, was a happy home even if it came with barely a stick of furniture and no carpets on the floor. Once again mattresses were laid down to serve as beds and Cliff's dad contrived to make two armchairs out of two packing cases he had purchased for a shilling each from the Atlas Lamp Company, where he was by now working as a clerk. The chairs would remain in the house for some while after Cliff had hit the big time as a reminder of their impoverished past and how they had come through the bad times.

Never take money for granted was the lesson Cliff learned at home. 'I was brought up in poverty, but poverty wasn't necessarily something that made us unhappy,' said Cliff years later. 'Looking back, I'm sure my mother and father could have been happier, but they never showed it.

'So many of my values come from them, because they were always so honest and even-handed. When I used to ask them for pocket money, because all the other children were given it, they'd tell me they couldn't because there wasn't any money. But they'd promise that when there was some, then I'd have some too.

'My dad impressed his values on me. I find it hard to spend money. I never take it for granted. My indulgences are my home and my clothes. I love going into garden centres and buying pots and plants. I have bursts of buying clothes, but I feel I have to justify the money I spend on stage clothes to my accountant. If my wardrobe gets too full, my secretary sends out batches of my old clothes to charities.'

In hard-up Britain in the 1950s, Rodger and Dorothy resourcefully managed what little money they had. Everywhere they looked, stores were offering furniture on

hire purchase. But Cliff's parents were of the old school and preferred, if they possibly could, to save up for various items and pay for them outright rather than take up the never-never payment option.

'My father found a way to deal with poverty by himself and never expected things to be done for him. If he couldn't afford armchairs he'd get some wood and build them. He hated to be on the HP. But in the end he gave in, because there was no other way of doing it.'

Luxury items, however, had to wait, and it was not until Cliff started seeing the financial rewards of his first record that the Webbs took delivery of a television set. But thanks to a windfall, they did find the cash for a record player – the old wind-up gramophone that had given the family much musical pleasure in India had been sorely missed.

'We didn't have a record player or anything like that for ages,' Cliff said. 'I never had a TV set until I bought one with my first lot of royalties and the only way we got the record player was because my dad won about £40 on the pools. There was a big argument about what we should buy, so we had a vote on it. My mum and I voted my dad out and we said: "We'll have a record player."'

Rodger and Dorothy had learned the hard way how to survive on very little, and drew great strength from adversity as they made the most of what they had. The experience rubbed off on Cliff so that in later years when he became hugely wealthy he still lived frugally.

'My upbringing made me appreciate not only the value of money,' Cliff said, 'but so many different things. If my parents hadn't been so strong and supportive, I would not only have been a very different person, but I'm sure that my career would have all ended in tears. After all, the pop business is immensely destructive. Look at what happens to so many stars, but they gave me the strength to handle the fact that your popularity waxes and wanes and you have to deal with that, and that it's a very rough ride.'

Not long after they had settled into their new home, Cliff took his eleven-plus, a streamlining examination taken by all primary schoolchildren to determine whether they would go on to grammar school – if they were bright enough – or to a secondary modern.

Both Harry's teachers and parents were confident that he would win a place at the grammar school because he had shown real progress and had the form prize to show for it. So it came as a profound shock to everyone, not least to Cliff, when he failed his eleven-plus exam.

Cliff's parents were deeply disappointed and not a little mystified as to how he had managed to fail the exam when his previous good work in the classroom had pointed to his sailing through it.

Norman Mitham, a good friend of Cliff's throughout his schooldays and later to become a member of his first group The Drifters, may have something of an explanation – the playground bullies had been after Cliff again. 'I wouldn't say Cliff was different, but he had that Indian tinge which was unusual back in 1950s Waltham Cross,' said Norman. 'And he did stand out, so he was picked on a lot. They used to call him Sabu the Indian boy because at that time there was a popular film out about Sabu.'

Cliff said, 'It was the same thing all over again – name-calling and more fighting. My father used to say that it was all right to fight, that if they hit you, then hit back even harder, but never instigate a fight. That thought presents a dilemma for me today, as a Christian you're supposed to turn the other cheek, and that's what I do, telling myself that I'm a much stronger person for not hitting back, but I'm not always convinced that's the case.'

Cliff believes, however, that it was simply exam nerves that got the better of him and prevented him from doing his best. His failure to win a grammar-school place hit him hard: he felt he had let everyone down, including himself, and his confidence was knocked sideways.

The newly built Cheshunt Secondary School now beckoned, and Cliff was not best pleased to discover, on his very first day, that he had been placed not in the A stream but in the B stream. Fortunately, this was a mistake, and he was promptly elevated to join the other secondary-mod newcomers in the brighter bracket of pupils. Even so, Cliff managed to pass only one O-level – in English, a subject he particularly warmed to under the inspirational teaching of Mrs Jay Norris, who particularly fired Cliff's imagination when she introduced him to *Wuthering Heights* as part of his school studies.

Jay recalled: '*Wuthering Heights* was one of the set O-level texts and he took to it straight away. Unhappily, his interest in rock and roll meant that he didn't put in quite enough work and he failed the literature exam by one mark. He was very upset about it.' Both the book and Mrs Norris were, however, to figure prominently in Cliff's life many years on, when Cliff starred in the musical *Heathcliff*.

It was Jay who roped Cliff into the school's dramatic society. They were always short of boys and Jay felt Cliff had a winsome demeanour about him and a charming smile. He proved enthusiastic and a good enough actor at fifteen to play Bob Cratchit in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* at the end of the autumn term in 1956. A review in the local paper, the *Cheshunt Weekly Telegraph*, stated: 'Harry Webb acted well as Bob Cratchit, but was rather let down by the make-up team and, hard as he worked, he could not dispel the impression that he was a teenager and not a harassed father.'

A pivotal moment followed when he was offered a starring part as Ratty in another school production, *The Wind in the Willows*. The problem for Jay Norris was that Cliff was reluctant to sing. 'So I blackmailed him into it,' Jay recalled. 'I said: "No sing, no Ratty." So he sang, and he was very good.'

It prompted Cliff to ask his teacher whether she felt there might be a future for him as a singer. 'Well, I don't know about that, but I certainly think you should have a job which allows you to smile at women,' was Jay's tactful reply to the teenager with a head full of dreams. Later she qualified her reply by saying: 'I thought he was too nice for the showbusiness rat race.'

Outside school Cliff was part of a gang of youngsters typically looking to spread their wings. Like countless other British teenagers they had started to become interested in the new brand of music emanating from America, which they could hear on Radio Luxembourg. If Cliff and his gang sometimes got up to mischief, it was of a prankish nature and stayed comfortably the right side of the law. There was never any chance of Cliff going off the rails with his pals, such was the disciplined code of behaviour imposed upon him by his father.

Always closer to his mother than his father, Cliff had immense respect for his dad, whom he has described as very strong, really tough. 'He was impressive because he was a disciplinarian,' he said. 'He was pretty strict and very stubborn.' Rodger Webb set the rules in his household, and he expected his children to obey them. As the eldest child, Cliff was entrusted with growing freedom, but Rodger still liked to impose strict limits and boundaries. One night, Cliff arrived back home half an hour late after going to the cinema. He returned home to find himself locked out of the house by his furious father.

After it appeared Rodger was in no mood to lift the lock-out, Cliff resigned himself to spending the night outside and gloomily sought refuge from the cold in the coal shed. But Rodger eventually took pity on him and allowed his suitably chastened son back into the house.

When it came to imposing discipline, Rodger was uncompromising, and a clout round the ear was a not