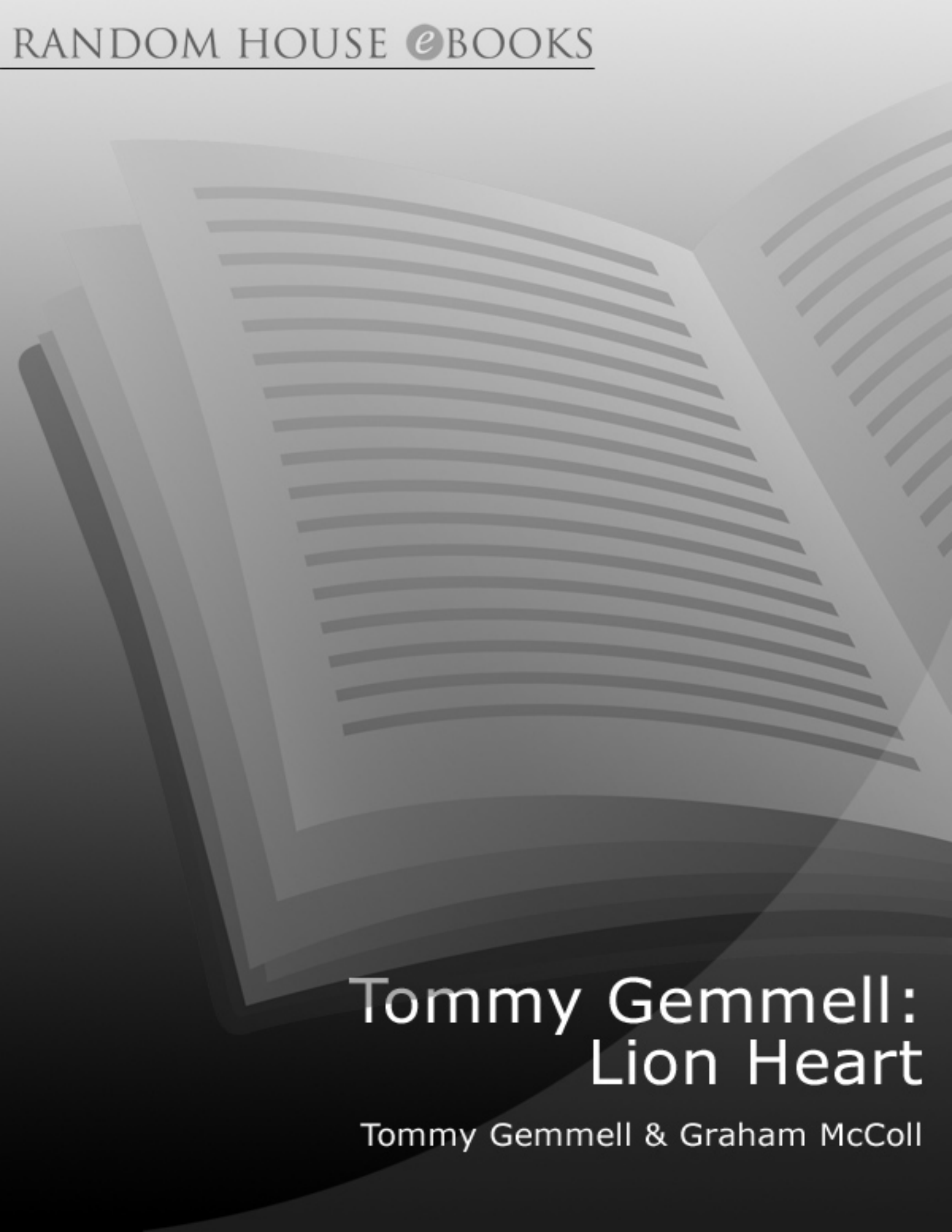


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Tommy Gemmell: Lion Heart

Tommy Gemmell & Graham McColl

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About the Book

Tommy Gemmell is pure Celtic – fronting an era of football that was ripe with politics, religion and community as well as 70-mile-per-hour shots. One of the legendary Lisbon Lions of 1967, his blistering equaliser and final pass brought the European Cup to British shores for the first time in history.

The real legend behind Tommy Gemmell, however, is the exciting extrovert who won Celtic fans young and old with his mischievous wit and impressively lavish lifestyle. Gemmell was a true 60s and 70s icon, forever in trouble with pernickety referees and sparking lengthy rows with the SFA and with Jock Stein.

In *Tommy Gemmell: Lion Heart* he sheds light on his career – from his earliest days of growing up in Lanarkshire, to his award-winning decade at Celtic, and through his work as a player and manager at Dundee and Albion Rovers. Always honest, Tommy Gemmell is not afraid to look back at Celtic's dominance in the 60s and offers his trademark forthright views on Celtic's progress and the game today.

**TOMMY
GEMMELL
Lion Heart**

**Tommy Gemmell &
Graham McColl**



*To everyone who helped me throughout my career,
too numerous to mention,
and also to the magical Lisbon Lyons*

FOREWORD by Jimmy Johnstone

Tommy Gemmell was by my side from the very first step that I took in my Celtic career. We met when we both signed for Celtic on the same night and, during the early stages of our careers at the club, Tommy and I and some other young Celtic players from Lanarkshire had a routine, set in stone, of going to a café called Bunty's on Tuesday and Thursday evenings after training, before taking the same bus back to Lanarkshire together. Those were happy times and we all became very friendly whilst we were youngsters.

We progressed to become full-time players at Celtic and, once Tommy had bought his first car, there were no more buses for us. He used to pick me up on the way into training and it was great to drive into Celtic Park in style with Tommy at the wheel. At that time, I was sleeping on a fold-down bed-settee that doubled up as a couch in my parents' front room and, when Tommy arrived outside our home, he would sound the car-horn to let me know he was there and ready to collect me. Sometimes, I would have been lying asleep but, when I heard the horn, I would just pop my head up above the bed-settee as if I had been ready and waiting for him all morning. I would then have to scramble around and get my things together before rushing out to Tommy's car.

Tommy was the original raiding full-back and it was always an exciting sight to see him thundering down the left wing on the overlap. We knew that with him in the side we were always good for a goal. He helped us forwards

because, with Tommy in the team, the other side's defence had one more very real danger to worry about. They had to watch him when he got within about 30 yards of goal, and that really stretched defences. There was nobody to match Tommy when we were playing together, although nowadays Roberto Carlos, the Brazilian left-back, is the same type of player, the kind of defender that people will pay to see.

I was one of the first players Tommy recruited when he became manager of Dundee but it was a funny situation. Tommy was there to do a job and make an impression as a young manager but I was playing out my career. It was a difficult time in my life and I have to say that my heart was not in it. I felt bad about the way things eventually turned out. I thought I could get away with doing certain things because Tommy was my friend as well as my manager and I took advantage of that situation. It was not right to do that when Tommy was trying to establish himself in management and I am glad that the situation was resolved quickly. It was my fault things did not work out for me and Tommy at Dens Park. I was pleased to see him go on and do a very good job as manager of Dundee.

Tommy improved tremendously as a player over the years through working hard at his game, but once the hard work in training was over he enjoyed a laugh and a joke. He is just the same nowadays and it is great to see him on each and every occasion when we get together. He is a terrific big guy and, like all the guys I played with, he is always close to my heart.

Jimmy Johnstone
June 2004

PROLOGUE - STRIKING GOLD

I WAS IN the wrong place at the wrong time when I scored the most important goal in my career, for Celtic in the 1967 European Cup final. That was in theory; in reality, I was in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. I had broken one of our manager Jock Stein's golden rules and, although he was probably furious with me at first, he couldn't say much when my gamble paid off and tilted the match in our favour. Big Jock always tried to keep an eye on me because he knew that I was one of the most likely to bend and break his rules, but on this occasion he could not criticise me as my defiance of his orders had brought such spectacular results.

Before my goal, we had been 1-0 down to Internazionale of Milan with more than an hour of the match played and, although we had had 95 per cent of the play, the Italians were holding out in defence, if only just. It was then that I noticed my fellow full-back Jim Craig making a free run with the ball down the right-hand side, so I just set off on a run of my own from our half. Now I should never have done that, because the golden rule was that if Jim Craig was going forward, I was supposed to be keeping the back door shut, along with Billy McNeill and John Clark. But sometimes rules are made to be broken. At that stage of the game Inter were playing with only one man up, Sandro Mazzola, so, with Billy, John and Ronnie Simpson, our goalkeeper, there at the back, there was no point in me hanging back and doing nothing.

I was on the edge of our centre circle and there was nobody in front of me, so I just made a bee-line through Inter's midfield and defence. I ran right through the middle of the park and no Italian player picked me up. It was

unbelievable. The guy that was supposed to be on me was Angelo Domenghini but he was a lazy so-and-so. Three times I shouted to Jim Craig to square it, but he held it ... and held it ... and held it. I was beginning to get exasperated with him, because I thought he was never going to cut it back to me and I was getting to the stage where I couldn't go any further. You can only run so far and then you've got to stop. He drew one defender to him, then another, and, when he drew that defender out, he finally decided to cut the ball back to me.

It was only a ten- or twelve-yard pass; that was how close I was to him as he cut it back to me diagonally. I would have been about 25 yards out when I was screaming for it so by the time it got to me I was about 22 or 23 yards out, slightly right of centre, on the arc, the 'D' marking the penalty area. It was a great pass, right along the deck, and the park was like a bowling green, so it was just a matter of timing. I was still making my run and the ball was on the deck when I hit it with my instep, latching on to it cleanly and at full tilt.

An Inter defender, Armando Picchi, had come out to block the ball as I prepared to shoot but about two yards from me he stopped and turned his back. All he had to do was take one more pace and he would have blocked the shot but, as the Italians often do, he came out so far and then turned his back. That gave me a free shot at goal. He may also have blinded his goalkeeper, Giuliano Sarti, slightly when he came out to shut me out, and that would have given Sarti less chance of getting to the ball. Shooting, basically, is all about timing. I just wanted to hit the ball as straight and hard as I could, and when I did I was confident that it was on target. I got right over the top of it and, although it was wide of the keeper, I don't think it was above shoulder-height. My momentum took me past Picchi and by that time the ball was in the net.

The first thing I said to myself was, 'That's it. We've got them now.' The Inter players chucked it as soon as I got that goal. You could see their looks of bewilderment. Their hands hit their hips and their heads drooped. As long as we didn't score, they felt they were winning the European Cup but they knew that if we got a goal there would be no way back for them. You could see defeat in their faces.

I had my socks at my ankles because of the heat and there was about half an hour to go. It was roasting. You couldn't get a breath; there wasn't even a breeze. When I went back for the restart and into the left-back position it made me the closest man to the dugout and big Jock Stein said, 'Take it easy, we'll take them in extra time.' I said, 'Fuck that, boss. It's eighty-five degrees out here and the sweat is pouring off us. I'm not playing for another half an hour. We're going to beat them now.'

1. GOOD CLEAN FUN

I SPENT THE best years of my boyhood being tutored in the finest football academy for which a youngster could have wished. It was called Craigneuk, the little Lanarkshire town where I was raised, which is halfway between Motherwell and Wishaw. The environment was perfect for any youngster like me who was enthralled by the game of football. There were dozens of other youngsters willing to play the game from morning to night, seven days a week, without ever tiring of it. You also had to learn to keep your wits about you to survive daily life in Craigneuk, so, all in all, it was a perfect preparation for the rigours and demands of life as a professional footballer.

I was born on 16 October 1943 at my granny's house in Cumbrae Drive in Motherwell, down in the Loaning area behind Motherwell Town Hall. We lived with my granny for five years because my mother and father couldn't get a house of their own. We then moved from my granny's to live with one of my aunts in Airbles Road in Motherwell, just a couple of hundred yards from the football ground - Fir Park. We stayed there for another two years. As usual, in those days, the house had only an outside toilet. Toilet paper was a luxury, so one of my first jobs in life, as a nipper, was to cut up newspapers into suitable sized pieces. There were no lights in the outside toilets and during a Scottish winter they were unbelievably cold. You wouldn't want to go out to them during the night, so when we lived with my auntie we would use a chamber pot. The outside toilet was shared with neighbours and there would be a rota for cleaning it, so the state it was in depended on whom you were sharing it with and their ability as

cleaners. It could be horrendous. Still, it never did us any harm.

When I was about seven we got our first house of our own, a prefab in Meadowhead Road, Craigneuk. Our new house had an inside toilet – oh, it was magnificent – but there wasn't a bathroom, so we used a tin bath in front of a coal fire. There was no central heating. Our family then numbered six: I had been my parents' first child but by the time we moved to Craigneuk I had a brother and two sisters; the next oldest is Moira, then David and Anna. We had only two bedrooms, so my brother and I slept in one bed, and my two sisters in another, in one room, while my mother and father slept in the other room. It was pretty cramped but we were at the age when it didn't really matter. Either the guys got up first or the girls did. I suppose it got a wee bit awkward as you got a wee bit older but you were stuck with it. At least it was a lot better than what we had had at my aunt's, where we had all been sharing one room and an alcove.

My father Alfie was a turner at Dalziel steelworks in Motherwell and spent his entire working life there. He was a very quiet man. My mother Margaret was the stronger one, it was she who would chastise us most often, so that we would do the right thing and work at school. If we were needing a clip across the ear, she would be the one to do it. My old man very seldom did that; I can recall him losing his temper only two or three times. But if you saw him getting worked up, you knew to back off. My mother had various jobs: she worked as a petrol pump attendant, did weekly collections for penny policies offered by the Co-op's insurance company and also worked at one of the first garages in Motherwell to have a shop and do-it-yourself pumps. Before we went to school, she looked after us during the daytime; once we were of school age she would work during the day. She would still come in at lunchtime

to give us our lunch, which would be something like a piece and jam, because we didn't have money to throw about.

My father was one of a family of thirteen, the last to be born and a twin. I inherited my nose from him, and my features are generally similar to his. My mother was a Stewart and was one of four. If you think back to the 1950s and pictures of film stars with curled, permed hair, that was what my mother looked like. All the women at that time had hot rollers and, when they used them, you could smell the hair burning. I vividly remember my mother and auntie doing each other's hair that way. My mother had a roundish face and wasn't a bad-looking woman. Although she had a fierce temper, she was actually a real softie.

My father was more reserved. He wasn't a socialiser, and he rarely drank. At New Year, we would go to my auntie's after the bells at midnight, and my auntie would pour him a sweet stout at half past midnight; when we left at four in the morning half of it would still be sitting in his glass. The reason was that half of his stomach had been taken away, I think because of stomach ulcers. I can remember my mother taking me into Glasgow Royal Infirmary to see him; that would have been when I was four or five. He hadn't been much of a drinker before but after that he just made up his mind to moderate his consumption of alcohol.

My parents taught us discipline. If you are taught discipline when you are a youngster it stays with you right through your life. I have always respected the law and have never become involved in any criminal activity. It was a good grounding we were given by our parents: we were taught respect for other people and their property. There's no such a thing as a bad kid: there are only bad parents.

We had only the basics in terms of furniture: a table and chairs, beds. We had one set of clothes each, more or less – maybe a spare pair of trousers and a spare shirt and sweater – one pair of shoes, and a pair of sandshoes, or

gutties as we called them, in which we could run about. I can remember going to school with holes in the soles of my shoes and two pieces of cardboard inside to protect my feet from the damp, nothing else, until my father could get hold of the leather to repair the shoes. It was a fairly ordinary, basic type of life and upbringing, nothing fancy, just the same as everybody around us. We were lucky that my old man never missed a day's work in his life, and my mother always had a job, either full-time or part-time, because she and my father needed all the money they could get to pay the rent and bring up four kids.

I used to have to go to the butcher's on a Saturday morning. There would be a queue 50 or 60 yards long outside, so I had to wait in the queue, pay the tick from the previous week, as noted in the butcher's book, and get whatever my mother wanted that day. Then, each day during the week, one of the family would go to the butcher's for that day's meat and get it put in the book again. Every trader had a tick book, and if you didn't pay them on a Saturday morning that was that: you didn't get anything else from them. Our normal breakfast would maybe be a boiled egg and toast or a piece and strawberry jam; we could not afford bacon and eggs or anything like that. For lunch it would be the same again and for dinner, mince and tatties or bangers and mash - stuff like that. It was very basic but you never starved. There was always plenty of bread and tatties but you didn't get anything exotic. At least, not often. I can distinctly remember my mother coming in one day with a melon. We had never seen one before. I said, 'What's that?' She said, 'It's a wee treat.' So she cut it up. It was rare to see fruit such as that but I didn't like it. She said, 'Eat it. You're not getting anything else.'

My father got a fortnight's holiday in the summer; that was his only break from work other than Christmas Day, Boxing Day and two days at New Year. We went six years in

succession to Girvan for our summer holidays, and six years on the trot my old man took me to the pictures, and six years on the trot it was the same movie: *The Jolson Story*, starring Al Jolson. I'd say, 'Dad, we're not going to see that again. We saw that last year.' There would be no stopping him, though. 'It's a great film,' he'd say and off we'd go. There must have been a lot of people of the same mind for the picture house to have put it on every summer. We then went six years in succession to Aberdeen. We always stayed in digs; never in bed-and-breakfast accommodation or hotels. So you had one or two rooms of the landlady's house to yourself. When we went to Aberdeen, the football season had started and we would usually see a couple of Aberdeen matches while we were up there. Otherwise, it would be the usual holiday stuff: playing on the beach, sandcastles, seagulls shitting on your head.

At Christmas, you would be doing well to get a present of any description. If you were lucky, you'd get the *Oor Wullie* or *The Broons* annual and your stocking filled with sweeties and maybe a toy of some sort. As I got older, my mother would give my brothers and sisters hand-me-downs; my brother would maybe get a toy train that I had had previously. There would be no turkey and trimmings for us at Christmas: it would be plain, normal, basic grub, nothing special – soup, steak pie and tatties. If we were lucky we might get chicken. Birthdays would be nothing special either. You would get a card from your mother and father: end of story.

My most vivid early memories are of school buses and school dinners. You were picked up every day by a free bus and got free school meals, which I loved. I went to Craigneuk Primary School and had my first game for the school's football team when I was about eight years old. I played wearing a pair of Wellington boots because we couldn't afford football boots and wellies were about the

nearest thing I had. You can imagine the big red rims round my legs after playing a match in Wellington boots. Eventually, my father got me a pair of football boots. He had a cobbler's last in the house and soled and heeled all the family's shoes because we couldn't afford to go to the cobbler's or to buy new shoes. He became very skilful; he had a hasp and mended heels and soles unbelievably well. So, given how tight finances were at home, I considered myself lucky when I was given a second-hand pair of football boots, even though they were two sizes too big for me.

At that time boots had individual leather studs, each with three nails in it, each nail about three quarters of an inch long. They were broad at the bottom and tapered to about a quarter of an inch at the top. My old man used to hammer all these studs into my football boots and use his cobbler's last to flatten the nails into the sole of the boot as they came through. Once you started wearing the boots, though, the nails loosened and you would end up getting cut feet because of the nails piercing the sole. Each time, my father would get the boots back on to the last to flatten the studs, but they would always come loose again and you would always end a match with cut feet. I shudder to think about the number of cuts you got in your legs when you played in schools football at that time, because when the leather wore down in the stud itself the nails would start to protrude, so that when you went into tackles, the nails in other players' studs would lacerate your legs. It was good for toughening us up, though.

We didn't have much else to do in Craigneuk other than play football. At home we had an old, old radio, or wireless, as it was called at that time, and I remember listening to the Top 20 on Radio Luxembourg early on a Sunday evening. That was the only time I really listened to it, but my mother would listen a lot. She was in her early twenties when I was born, so she was still young when I was

growing up, and she listened to all the hit records of the day: Bill Haley and the Comets, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Nat King Cole and Cliff Richard, who was breaking through at that time – mainly melodies but with a wee bit of rock ‘n’ roll in there as well. We couldn’t afford a record player so she relied on the radio, and terrible squeaks and screeching used to come out of it sometimes, maybe halfway through a record, because it had old-fashioned valves and was on its last legs. We didn’t have a television when I was a young boy but I can remember going to a neighbour’s house to see what I believe was the first floodlit match played in Scotland: Clyde playing Wolverhampton Wanderers. At that time Wolves had a great side with Billy Wright, Ron Flowers and Bert Williams, the goalkeeper. That neighbour was the only one in our wee cul-de-sac of six detached prefabs who had a television. When anything like that was on, everybody went into their house. Eventually, we got a telly, a second-hand job. That would have been in the late ‘50s, when I was around thirteen, and we thought we were the bee’s knees. We never had a telephone all the time we lived in that prefab.

For games, other than football, we would do things like make our own bows and arrows by cutting branches off trees and using a knife to sharpen the arrows. It was a happy childhood. Everybody did the same things: hide and seek, all that sort of stuff. Then, when we got a bit older, we used to go down to an orchard and steal apples and pears, or steal turnips and tatties out of folk’s gardens and then build a wee fire on waste ground and throw the tatties and turnips on to it. They would come out all black and when you ate them you ended up looking like Al Jolson. We would often be caught and get a boot on the arse from the farmer or the person whose garden we had raided.

I also got caught a few times playing football in the street. It’s funny: nowadays people say that one of the reasons we no longer have such great players in Scotland is

that boys no longer play football in the street. The thing is, when I was a boy, you were never actually *meant* to play football in the street – for your own safety, in case you got hit by a vehicle. Anyway, we played in the street all the time. Sometimes we didn't have a ball so we just played with a tin can. You would go to play football in the street and before you knew it, the cops would nip round the corner and grab you. You froze as soon as they said, 'Don't move!' Everybody was terrified of the cops because it was driven into you not to get into any bother with the police, so you had a natural fear of authority. You were told that you could get locked up in the bad boys' school and we knew boys to whom that did happen. That would be for serious stuff like thieving, though, and we never did any serious thieving or kicking in windows or doors or anything like that.

We also used to play cards – maybe pontoon but for no money – in derelict buildings and the cops would come up with their batons drawn and give you a boot on the arse. It was actually for your own good because those buildings could have collapsed at any time. That was when I was about eight or nine years old. The cops would take your address and go to your house and tell your parents where they had found you. Then, the next time you went in, you would get a boot on the arse from your old man or a skelp across the jaw from your mother. Like most working-class people, they saw it as a stigma to have the police at the door of the family home.

One day whilst playing football in the street I was hit by a van. It caught me a glancing blow on my backside. You were supposed to stop and let a van past but I didn't see it because we were busy playing. I had to limp along to the house, which was about 100 yards away. My old man said, 'What happened to you?' I said, 'I was playing football in the street and got hit on my backside by a van.' He wasn't exactly sympathetic: he gave me a boot on the arse, on the

other side from where I had been struck by the van. 'That's evened it up,' he said. 'You've got a proper sore arse now.'

Craigneuk was a hard, hard place in which to be raised. There were rival teenage gangs only three or four streets away from where we lived. I kept out of their road and never got involved but I saw them going about with cleavers, sickles and all sorts of other weapons. There was a hard core that made sure there were always gang-fights in Craigneuk. You had to keep your nose clean: if you joined a gang, you could be sure that the other two or three gangs were looking for you, so I had nothing to do with any of them; as soon as I saw them I would disappear. There was quite a lot of violence; I saw two or three gang-fights in the street, maybe a couple of hundred yards away from me. In the papers next day there would be stories about people having had their ears cut off in these fierce battles. Thankfully, they kept it to their own part of town, the top end, the Wishaw side, and I lived on the Motherwell side.

The main street in Craigneuk would probably be about a mile long and the town was about half a mile wide. The streets backed on to the Ravenscraig steelworks and were lined with old tenements with outside toilets and communal outdoor wash-houses with great big tubs, around two feet square, for people to do their washing in, using the old washboards. You had to watch your washing because if somebody saw your shirt out on the line they would nick it if they got a chance. There was still a good community spirit in Craigneuk; the hooligans kept to their own type and the decent folk kept to theirs. I can't remember us ever falling out with neighbours. Nowadays you've got folk in detached houses and they won't talk to their neighbours across the garden wall but we got to know them all. Most people lived in tenements so they knew each other from sharing outside toilets and tubs at the steamie.

Then there would be the bookie's runner on the street corner, because bookies were illegal at that time. The

bookie's runner would take your bets and money and then take them down to the bookie and put them on. My old man got nabbed a couple of times for dealing with a bookie's runner. The bookie's house was used as a betting shop; the cops knew what was going on and would raid it now and again, just to keep up appearances, and everyone who was caught inside would be fined £1. My old man liked a wee punt and was caught in there a couple of times but the bookie always paid his customers' fines and the whole thing would start all over again.

Although football took up much of my time, I still won the Dux medal at Craigneuk Primary School. Equally importantly, as it seemed to me, we won the Motherwell and Wishaw Primary School League trophy. Before you left primary school, you had to sit the eleven-plus examination, the result of which would determine which secondary school you attended. The eleven-plus was feared because at that early stage in your life it could do an enormous amount to determine what would happen to you later. If you failed, you went to a school which concentrated on technical subjects and you were almost certainly destined to become a manual worker; if you passed, you would go to a school where they focused on academic subjects and you had a strong chance of becoming a white-collar worker. I was quite happy in the run-up to it because we had had monthly exams in writing, spelling and arithmetic and I always passed them without any problems. As I had won the Dux medal out of the 40 pupils in our year, and all of us were crammed into the same classroom, I knew whom I was competing with and I was quite confident of success in the eleven-plus. I passed it with flying colours and went to Wishaw High School, a senior secondary; those with a lower mark in the eleven-plus went to Wishaw Central School, a junior secondary.

At Wishaw High School I got even more involved in playing football, and academic subjects began to take a

back seat. I also had a paper run in the morning, for which I would rise at six o'clock, and a Lipton's grocery run after school, for which I had one of the shop's bikes with a basket on the front. So with the football and my two part-time jobs, I had little time for homework. I would try to get my homework done after my paper round and before I cycled to school, which was about three miles away, or scramble to do it in the classroom before the teacher entered to begin that day's lesson. At primary school, I had studied. That was how I had won the Dux medal; my mother would tell me I wasn't going down the park to play football until I had done my homework. At night, in those early school years, I would do my homework, have a quick bite to eat and then go down the park to play football until it was dark.

Having so few luxuries and distractions at home, we got most of our enjoyment from playing football. Once we had graduated to having a proper laced-up football to play with, we had started going down to the public park and there was no more football in the street. On evenings after school about twenty of us would put our jackets down and play football until it was dark. During summer nights we would go to the park at five o'clock and still be playing football at half past ten, by which time the scoreline would be 44-all or something like that. That was probably the best background you could have if you wanted to be a footballer. We would not worry about our homework - *that* was our homework. Nowadays, if you pass a public park in Scotland, you will very rarely see youngsters playing football, and maybe that's why the Scottish national side is in the mess it's in at the moment.

In another football-based game that we used to play, four or five of us hit a ball against a tenement's gable end and each guy was given the name of a team. As soon as you hit the ball against the gable end, you shouted out the name of a team and the player who had been given that

team name was supposed to take just one touch to hit the ball off the wall; he wasn't allowed to control it. He would then shout out the name of another team and another player would have to go for the ball, using his left or right foot, whichever was best for hitting the ball back off the wall. Now that sharpened up your reactions and control. It was a good grounding – nobody gave us any coaching in how to pass or control a ball or how to shoot or head or anything. You just had to teach yourself and the more you did it the easier it became.

As a schoolboy footballer for Wishaw High, I played outside-right for the junior and intermediate teams. I never got a chance to get in a lot of shots at goal in those days as all I was doing was sticking in crosses. So I had no idea then that I had the potential to be a goal scorer. I was also playing against guys who eventually signed for Celtic. One was Bobby Murdoch, who was playing for Our Lady's High School in Motherwell. They also had John Cushley, Tom Duddy and Jim Conway, the centre-forward, all of whom also signed for Celtic. They were the best team by far in schools football in the Lanarkshire area at that time but we always seemed to beat them. Bobby played against me in the junior side and then their intermediate side. I also remember that when I was playing for Wishaw High's intermediate team, Billy McNeill was playing for Our Lady's senior team and someone told me he was signing for Celtic. You could see why: in the air, he was absolutely fantastic. The Celtic scout for Lanarkshire at that time was Eddie McArdle, who later became Lord Provost of Motherwell and Wishaw, and the number of players he took from Our Lady's High School to Celtic was nobody's business.

When I got to fourteen, I was playing not only for the school but also for an amateur side called Meadow Thistle, so named because the guys who formed the committee all lived on Meadowhead Road, as I did; I was one of the

founder members of the club, which played in the Lanarkshire Under-18 Amateur League. I was usually too young to get a game but when they were short of players they stuck me in and I played on the right wing. One day, when I was fifteen, they were short of a full-back and stuck me in at left-back. I was quite comfortable hitting the ball with my left or my right peg because of all the time I had spent hitting that ball against that gable end in my earlier years, and I quickly became a regular in the side. As a boy, I wasn't very well-built; in fact, I was quite slight. At fifteen, I was about five feet four inches tall but by the time I was eighteen I was six feet one. During my early amateur days I was constantly being brushed aside, so I wasn't a lot of good to the team. I was just another body. Then I started sprouting and getting a bit broader and stronger.

I did like some subjects at secondary school, such as arithmetic, geometry, geography and history, and I was fine with physical education but I hated other subjects like algebra and logarithms and just switched off in those classes, so I wasn't getting very good marks but I was scraping through. I hated my algebra teacher. He had one of those dusters with a wooden base that they used to wipe clean the blackboard, and, if you were looking down at your desk and not paying attention, he would launch it at you across the classroom. He had perfect aim and, if the wooden bit struck you on the head, it was too bad. There was also a woodwork teacher who, if you made a mess of something, would make you lean over the desk, take a plank of wood and batter you across the backside with it three or four times. The pain was unbelievable. Apart from those two maniacs, the teachers were all right.

If I had been rubbish at football, I would probably have stuck in at school a bit more. Even so, at the age of sixteen, I could have stayed on at school if I had wanted to, because I had obtained the appropriate grades, but my old man said they were looking for apprentices at the Ravenscraig

steelworks, which had recently opened and which belonged to David Colville & Sons, who also owned the steelworks at which my father was employed. The personnel people at his work had put up notices saying that apprenticeships were available at Ravenscraig and anyone who had a son who might be suitable should have him apply. Employers of Colville & Sons - so long as they were highly rated as workers - would get the first chance of putting their sons' names down.

So I went down to Dalziel steelworks for an interview. My father told me that I should take the chance of an apprenticeship because he and my mother knew I was struggling at school, since I was playing more football than I had ever played in my life. After a second interview, I was offered an apprenticeship. I could have taken my pick and trained as an engineer, an electrician or an instrument mechanic; a whole gamut of trades was available. I decided to become a sparky, an electrician, and the tools and facilities were brand-new and bang up-to-date. It was quite a prize for a lad like me from a working-class background. So far as the company was concerned, they believed they were getting a good worker because, they thought, if the father was conscientious, the son would be as well.

We started at seven o'clock and finished at half past four. I had been given a bike by my parents for winning the Dux medal and, when I was sixteen and starting to serve my apprenticeship at Ravenscraig, the company sent me to Mossend steelworks, the training school, for six months. I was using this school bike, that I had been given when I was twelve, to cycle four miles or so up and down hills to Mossend and my knees were hitting the handlebars. As with so many youngsters in the late 50s and early 60s, that time of full employment, my life looked as though it was already mapped out for me, even though I was still only in my mid-teens. But then, just as everything looked set to

take an utterly predictable shape, my life began to develop in a manner I had never dreamed possible.