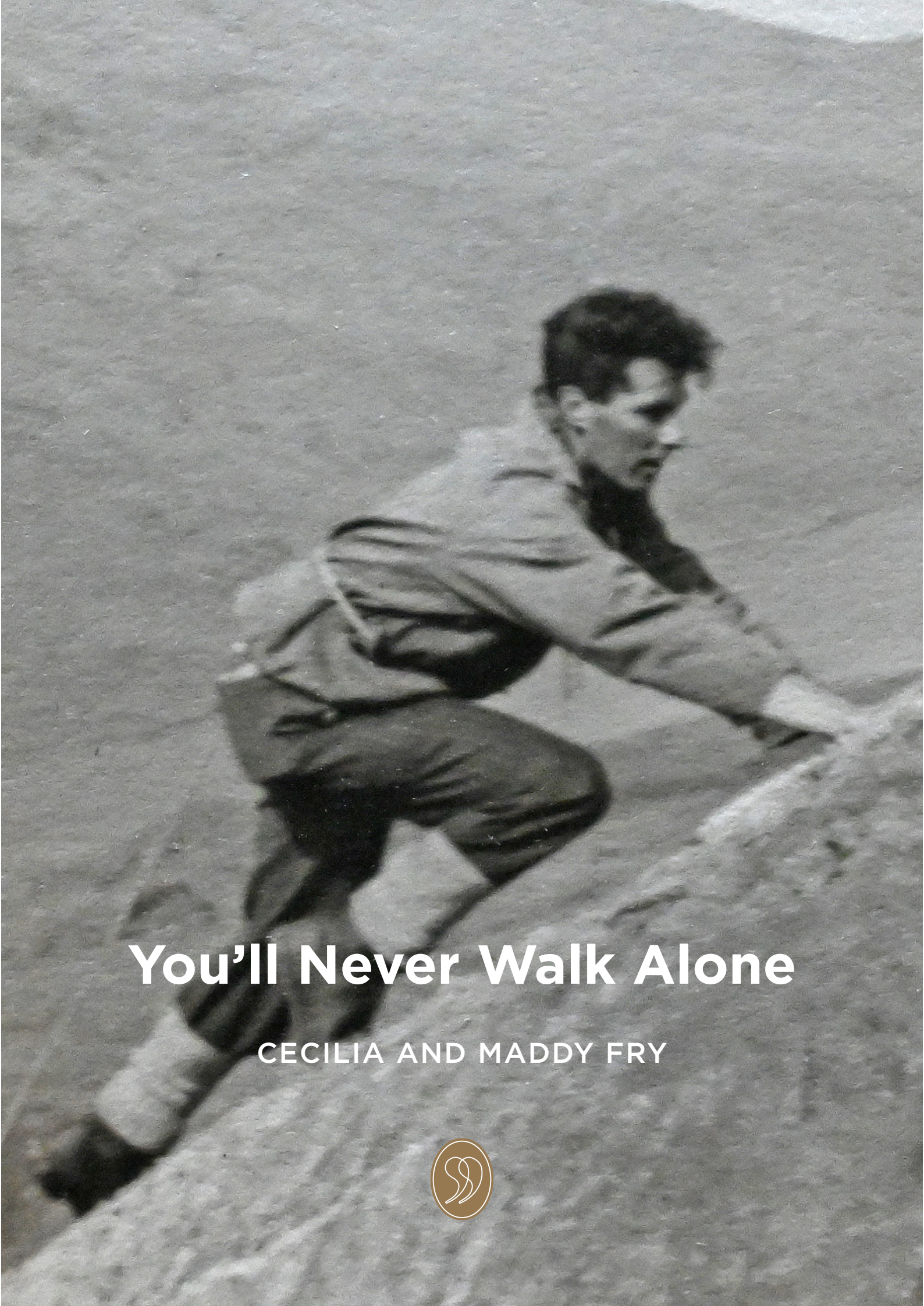


You'll Never Walk Alone

CECILIA AND MADDY FRY

You'll Never Walk Alone



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StoryTerrace

Text Maddy Fry, on behalf of StoryTerrace

Design StoryTerrace

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1

THE LEAVING OF LIVERPOOL

St Joseph's College, Lancashire, 1941

A teenage boy stands by an imposingly high brick wall, one he is about to try and climb. He and his friends on the other side have been planning their escape for weeks. They know it will be temporary, but it will be the only relief they have known since entering the miserable building they have been forced to call home for the last five years.

They are not prisoners and have committed no crimes. They are trainee priests sent to a residential seminary school where hot water, decent food and contact with their families are almost non-existent and corporal punishment is common. It is a brutal, austere life for anyone and especially for 17-year-old Sam, who loves the outdoors and is frequently homesick for his large and energetic family.

Right now, all he wants to do is go to the cinema with his friends. It is a pleasure that boys and girls up and down the

country regularly enjoy on a Saturday night, but one denied by the masters at St Joseph's College, who want the boys to forgo all worldly desires and pursuits.

Sam shivers, his dark school suit and regulation shoes inadequate for keeping out the cold. He hops from one foot to the other nervously, his boots pinching at his heels. They are his only pair and have to last him for the entire year, despite the protestations of his growing feet. He cannot know how much his meagre footwear will deform him – a cruel outcome for a boy who loves football, cycling and hiking, and always will.

With great pain he hauls himself over the wall and drops down on the other side. He pauses for a moment, breathing in this strange new liberty, before walking as fast as he can towards the nearby town of Wigan. He is determined that tonight will be fun, even though he will pay for it later – probably at the end of a leather strap, or worse.

Sam is an unlikely rebel. Despite the harshness of his surroundings, he is a quiet, dutiful, often passive boy with profound Catholic beliefs, ones that his schoolmasters have not beaten out of him.

When backed into a corner, however, he is adept at finding escape routes, a skill that will stand him in great stead while also getting him into considerable trouble. His time at St Joseph's is not the first or last of his misfortunes, but he will also know great joy. Fatherhood (albeit not the kind being taught to him at the seminary), faith, and football will be the

cornerstones of his existence, often giving him stability in a changing world, one marked by the Second World War and later, the turbulence of the '60s and '70s.

Until he is sent away at 12, his childhood is a humble but happy one. His parents, Martha and Samuel, are staunch working-class Catholics raising a family within Liverpool's close-knit Irish immigrant community.

In many ways, his mother, formerly Martha Swarbrick, is an outsider. A convert to Catholicism from Methodism, she has none of her husband's Irish roots. Yet she is loving and resilient, having escaped an upbringing marred by her merchant sailor father's alcohol=induced violence, with his return home from long voyages often causing his children to run away and hide.

Out of her 16 siblings, only six will survive into adulthood. At the age of 12, Martha is forced to leave school and fake her identity by pretending to be her deceased older sister, Bella, in order to secure work as a loom operator in one of the Lancashire mills and thereby help to support the large family.

Despite her father's frequent absences throughout the 1880s and 1890s and his constant cruelty towards his wife and children whenever he is at home, Martha manages to forgive him – a tendency she will pass on to her eldest son.

Although their cultural and religious backgrounds differ, Samuel has, like Martha, already endured considerable trauma due to his service in France during the First World

War. While helping to mend a revolver, Samuel discharges the weapon into his foot, causing a wound that his superiors automatically believe to have been inflicted deliberately. If convicted of cowardice, Samuel faces death at the receiving end of a firing squad – yet his commanding officer thankfully has his back.

He is subsequently demoted to the army's Labour Corps, where his duties consist of digging trenches and graves. These experiences profoundly impact his attitude to military service, later telling his sons that he would 'break their legs' before letting them join the British Army.

When the two first meet, Martha takes comfort in the fact that unlike many of his peers Samuel does not drink, eschewing the pub for the comforts of home, where he will enjoy playing with their many children. The two are wed in 1923, and their first child, Sam, is born a year later. Anne follows soon after, as do four more children: Charlie, Joan, Vin and Marie.

They live in a small, terraced house in the Litherland region of Liverpool, surrounded by a hefty support network of other working-class families. Life is simple, defined by manual labour for Samuel at the Bryant and May match factory, and later briefly as a shipwright's labourer, and heavy domestic duties for Martha, who spends a large amount of time cooking, washing, and making clothes for the children. Sanitation and heating come in the form of a solid fuel range and a small open fire, with an outhouse

in the yard and a tap along the street. Electricity will arrive eventually, but not for some time.

From the outset, young Sam is an unusually quiet child, not uttering a word until he is two years old, when he feels compelled to tell his mother that he 'doesn't like peas'. Nonetheless, his early years are idyllic, with the children growing up in an era when few cars are on the street and it is safe for them to roam free, often to play football with the other youngsters in the neighbourhood. The family make frequent trips to the seaside at Seaforth, a beach that will eventually become a container terminal when the Liverpool docks are extended.

All six children attend Holy Sepulchre, the local Roman Catholic primary school. Here, the conventions of working-class life mean that most of their classmates will not continue their education past the age of 14, leaving to find jobs in industry or domestic service that will support their parents and siblings until they themselves get married and leave home. Yet Sam's life will follow a very different trajectory.

The priest at the church where the family attends Mass comes around one day to ask Samuel and Martha if they feel any of their sons might be ready for the priesthood. This is a tried and tested strategy used by the Church at the time, with the rules around clerical celibacy meaning that couples with more than one son are more likely to agree to some of their offspring permanently forgoing the ability to give them grandchildren or provide a wage for the family. With

three sons at their disposal, the priest is hopeful that the McCabes can be convinced.

As it transpires, they need little persuading. Although Martha and Samuel have little sense of what the school will be like, they know it offers their son the only chance of a post-14 education, and a good one at that. The priest, after all, is considered a learned figure in the community, and the curriculum will no doubt expose young Sam to Latin, Greek and theology, and a solid career path that will provide financial security and stability for his entire life.

Sam gets little say in the matter. Catholicism is a way of life for the family rather than just a faith, and Martha proves to be an especially fervent Catholic, perhaps, as a convert, feeling she has to prove her devotion to her husband's faith. This makes the prospect of a son in the priesthood an even more enticing one.

In time, all three boys will make the journey to Up Holland – but in 1936, Sam, as the eldest, must go alone. Here, the simple comforts of his childhood will come to an abrupt end. He has a tough road ahead.



Sam's maternal grandmother, Mary Anne McDonald, in the 1880s.



Samuel (with Vin) Front: Charlie, Anne, Martha (with Marie), Sam, Joan, circa 1936



Sam, circa 1933

2

THE ACCIDENTAL PRIEST

St Joseph's College is an imposing building, a huge Victorian gothic anomaly in the otherwise quiet, unremarkable village of Up Holland near Wigan. Founded in 1880, it is an intentionally secluded place. When 12-year-old Sam arrives in September 1936, he finds himself very quickly in a cloistered world cut off from both women and non-Catholics, surrounded by boys who, like him, arrive wearing only sombre, dark suits, carrying with them a few limited possessions. Any colour, warmth or joy to be had from the material world is absent. Later on in his war diary Sam will remember his first day at the college as one of the saddest in his life.

The junior seminarians, aged 11 to 18, are housed in a separate part of the school from the older men in the full throes of their clerical training. Their semi-monastic routine is not cruel, but it is undeniably tough, in keeping with the traditions held by many boys' boarding schools all over the country. The children are given simple, plain food

of low quality, with the odd maggot being found in their breakfast porridge. They are expected to bathe only in cold water, making the harsh winter months in the north-west of England feel even more bitter.

Their days revolve around prayer, confession and attendance at Mass. Decades later Sam's daughter Cecilia will be moved to tears upon hearing about the harshness of life at the college, so much so that she cries quietly in the back of the car while he tells the tale.

The education the boys receive is broader than that of the grown men at the college, who only study philosophy and theology, and it echoes many of the traditions of British public schools. They are drilled in Latin, Greek, theology and sport – mainly football, which they play on fields set aside from the school's main quadrangle – and any rule-breaking is punished by the masters hitting the boys with canes or leather straps.

While unpleasant, corporal punishment is a common practice in education at the time, and St Joseph's deploys it no more or less than any other institution. However, it is notable that, during his teaching career, Sam refuses to use it on his own charges, despite the practice not being fully banned until after he retires.

Although the school will later be dogged by allegations of sexual abuse towards children, a factor undoubtedly contributing to its closure in the 1990s, there is little hint of it during Sam's tenure.

Yet unlike in other boarding schools, the students in Up Holland cannot go home for the Christmas or Easter holidays. Relatives rarely visit and contact with them until the summer holidays is limited to written correspondence. To add to this, unlike their compatriots at Eton or Winchester the Up Holland boys study little maths, science, history, geography or literature. The belief that Roman Catholicism is the one true faith underpins everything they are taught.

As an adult, Sam will avoid many of the era's prejudices, especially as the war with Germany looms, but he will never embrace ecumenism. Despite the harshness of his surroundings and later, the doubts he secretly nurses about many of the church's dogmas, he remains resolute throughout that to be a Catholic is to have won the lottery of this life and the one beyond.

Perhaps this motivates him to survive the school – although as his antics later will prove, such spiritual sustenance can only take him so far.

Sam is mostly a quiet child, cutting a very different figure from his younger brother Charlie, who follows him. He occasionally joins his classmates for the odd game of football in his spare time, but for the most part he is a loner, enjoying his own company and the chance to indulge his vivid imagination. This raconteur tendency will delight the herds of youngsters that will later dominate his life, including his children and grandchildren and those he teaches at the various primary schools where he will eventually find his vocation.

Ten years Sam's junior, Vin McCabe, the youngest brother, is even quieter than Sam but gets more from life at the school due to his fondness for sports. Yet his attitude to the regime hardens as the three boys grow and mature. The strictures the school places on their personal lives during the summer holidays begin to chafe, particularly when they are handed small guidance cards reminding them to remain devoutly chaste and to eschew the company of 'unsuitable companions' (most likely women) and not to read 'sensuous poetry,' among other evils.

Vin writes to his mother to ask if he can leave. Unsurprisingly, Martha resists, telling him he can come if he truly hates it, but urges him not to let others dissuade him from his calling into the priesthood - and even not to 'let the devil have his way'.

As difficult as this is for her son to accept, Martha's attitude is not purely based on religious fervour. She has realised that this is their best chance at gaining a public-school education at a reduced price, with the parish in Litherland covering some of the cost of their tuition.-

This almost fanatical insistence on keeping Sam, Vin and Charlie trapped in the seminary will be a cause of great resentment to Martha and Samuel's three daughters. In 1941, tragedy visits the family, and the cost of keeping them there becomes even greater.

At 17, Sam and his brothers are told that their father has been admitted to hospital with haemorrhoids. This being

just before the era when antibiotics become easily accessible, the condition has become very serious, so much so that Samuel requires a blood transfusion.

Tragically for the family, despite knowledge about blood types being widespread by this time, the blood Samuel is injected with is the wrong type for his body. He dies as a result of medical negligence, aged 51 years old.

The impact on his young and once happy family is lasting and profound. Martha retreats into a severe depression, unable to cope with the demands of being a widow with six children under the age of 18. For weeks after her husband's death, she rarely exits the house, leaving Joan and Vin to do the shopping and keep the household going.

One small shred of hope for the family is the support from their local parish, which can provide financial assistance to orphans and widows in the community. This assistance will be vital, as the Bryant and May match factory has already been devastated by German bombs, threatening the family's income even before Samuel's death. Anne is forced to leave school and undertake a clerical job at Vernon's Pools, a betting company, to support the family.

For many decades, Sam will feel a profound sense of rage and injustice over the hospital's cavalier attitude to his father's demise, convinced that the devastation endured by the family is merely seen as collateral damage, most likely due to their working-class status. His political leanings, particularly his support for the Labour Party and the

changes they will bring less than 15 years later, are nurtured here.

The family is faced with the difficult choice of whether to keep the boys at St Joseph's. With little money to contribute to the fees, Martha's insistence that they stay means that the four women live an even more impoverished existence than they did before. Neither Anne nor Joan can finish school. It turns out there is plenty of anger to go around; the sense that the boys have been prioritised over the well-being of the girls is a feeling that never leaves them.

For Marie, the youngest of the six, the anger turns out to be a source of energy. She not only finishes school but trains to be a teacher and eventually becomes mayor of the town of Frodsham in Cheshire. Her feminist convictions about the importance of equal access to education and career opportunities for women will stay with her for her entire life. She will also remain close to Sam, despite him rarely sharing her views.

Anne and Joan move into more white-collar jobs, with Anne working in a hospital as a nurse and Joan starting out as a clerk, eventually becoming a legal secretary. Yet both have seen their opportunities blighted by the death of their father and their mother's dogged insistence that the boys stay at a school they loathe. They do not forget it, although neither manage to turn their anger into a fire similar to Marie's, with both nursing a life-long sense of grievance.

The year that follows is a chaotic one for Sam. At 17 he

rebels, climbing over the school wall to go to the cinema. Although they make it to see the film, most likely an Abbott and Costello picture such as *In the Navy*, they are eventually caught. The school contacts Martha and suggests to her that Sam leave, effectively expelling him.

Despite the sense of disaster that this brings to a family already in crisis, Sam's time at St Joseph's will not totally go to waste.

It is 1941, and Europe is already embroiled in conflict with Germany. Young men across the country are being conscripted into the armed forces and sent to Europe and the Far East. Sam knows this is a fate he may not be able to escape – and that his father's vow to stop his sons from ever joining the British Army cannot be fulfilled. The class prejudices of Britain's military have often held back boys like Sam, and yet bizarrely, they will eventually play out in his favour.

He exits St Joseph's with a sense of relief. He has survived this strange place, yet the challenges are far from over. Adulthood, and a world at war, await him.

thought and conduct which will serve as a guide to him in the course of his future life But as the vacation brings with it not merely relaxation from study, but complete emancipation from College Discipline, the Ecclesiastical Student is thrown to a great extent on his own resources, as to the manner and rule of life he leads during that time. Experience shows that from want of some "ideal" how to spend the well deserved rest and leisure, many fall into grave dangers, and some make shipwreck of their virtue and vocation. To lessen this danger the following suggestions are put before Students for their guidance—

1st. It is well to bear in mind that the object of the vacation is twofold :—

(1) To recruit the energies of the body and mind by change of air, and scene, and occupation.

(2) To afford an opportunity of putting one's virtue and constancy to a test and trial, now that the restraints and supports of College rules have been removed.

2nd. Hence to enable him to come through this trial, the Student should have a Short Rule of Life drawn up, which will be practical under the altered circumstances in which he is living, and which should embrace what he should *do*, and what he should *avoid*.

(1) Thus he will fix the hour for Rising, and the time and place for the performance of those Spiritual Exercises, which he practises at College.

(2) He will also arrange some useful occupation when not engaged in other innocent recreation, *e.g.* a course of reading, or working up some weak point in his study.

On the other hand he will note what to *fear* and *avoid :*

(1) All intimate friendship with worldly minded and unsuitable companions, and all unsuitable amusements which, as an Ecclesiastical Student, he knows to be such, or which he feels his superiors would discountenance.

(2) Idleness, listlessness, and mere killing time.

(3) Unhealthy reading, such as trashy romances and sensuous poetry.

(4) Fast habits—undue attention to toilet and dress, and to anything which smacks of worldly vanity.

3rd. Good manners and ordinary rules of decorum require, that one of the first calls made after reaching home should be to the Presbytery, to pay his respects to the Rector, and to let him know of his presence in the Parish. Should the Rector express a wish to have his services at any of the Church functions, let him at once signify his willingness to oblige him.

And in general, to his Priest, his relations, and friends, on all occasions let him endeavour to show by his conduct and manners, that College training has made him neither conceited, nor proud, nor self-willed, but on the contrary, kind, considerate, and selfsacrificing. Thus he will edify all who see him, and do honour to his College and Superiors.

L. D. S.

An extract from the Guidance Book given to St Joseph's pupils when they were at home for seven weeks in the summer.



Pupils from Up Holland on a rare outing. Sam is on the far right.

3

OH, WHAT A LOVELY WAR!

In 1942, Sam finds himself back in Liverpool, attempting to piece together what remains of his family life and his school career. Although he is not yet 18, the need for him to find work to support his mother and siblings is imperative. Unfortunately, he has a limited number of options for finishing his education, eventually settling for studying in night school while working for one of his cousins as a builder's mate on a construction site. He gets great satisfaction from seeing a bungalow built from scratch, and while he will never become gifted at construction, he will always enjoy it. His later attempts at renovating a car to fit eight people (initially designed for five) will attest to this.

A year later, at the age of 19, his Draft Notice arrives. He is conscripted into the army and sent for basic training, first to Salisbury and then to the Highlands of Scotland, before eventually being posted to Germany.

To everyone's surprise, not least Sam's, he finds army life hugely enjoyable. The strictness of his seminary education

makes his training as a soldier seem mild by comparison. Some routines from his military career become hard to shake off in later life, particularly his habit of rising at the crack of dawn to do push-ups – something his granddaughter Maddy insists on joining him for, for a short while at least.

His time in Scotland is a life-changing experience. As a boy raised in a small, terraced house in a bustling industrial city but who loves the outdoors, Sam sees the rugged, mountainous terrain dotted with boulders, lakes and wild heather as being as close to paradise as he has ever known. It is the beginning of a love affair that will sustain him for the rest of his life.

To the army, Sam presents an interesting dilemma. As a child from the backstreets who still speaks with the remnants of a Scouse accent, his background does not make him an obvious candidate for promotion. Yet his knowledge of Latin and Greek means he has something in common with those who comprise the upper-class ranks of the army. His superiors decide to put him forward for officer training.

Alas, although well-intentioned, it is a strategy that backfires. Despite Sam's love of fresh air, the beauty of his surroundings and the camaraderie he builds with other young men training beside him, the differences between his education and those educated in the public school system are laid bare. Sam will not bark orders at his fellow soldiers, which ensures he cannot pass officer training.

Still, he is unruffled. He has made great friendships

and known a bizarre but genuine sense of freedom and independence.

In late 1944 as the war is drawing to a close, Sam is finally sent abroad. He is deployed to Holland then Belgium and finally Northern Germany; postings that at least mean he will avoid the terrors awaiting his unluckier comrades in Burma and Singapore - many of whom will never return. The realisation that he will not be sent to the Far East with the rest of his friends leaves him feeling dejected - or as he writes in his war diary, 'I don't think in my whole life I have ever been so cheesed and browned off.'

Initially, like the work of many soldiers in wartime his duties are stultifying and repetitive. He spends time in the army's survey regiment in Ijmuiden in Holland where his duties include guarding prisoners of war, before ending up in Hanover in North-Rhine Westphalia when the war is over, and the British Army are the 'Occupying Forces'. He is sent to work as a PT Instructor before subsequently manning an information post (with the defining feature being an inability to produce information anyone actually needs). The result is that he is mainly left to his own devices.

The diary he keeps during this period is cryptic, describing only the basic facts about his duties, as well as his attempts at dodging them altogether. During his downtime, he finds novel ways to increase his food rations and goes out on light-hearted 'capers' to the swimming pool, the cinema and the beach.

The trauma he goes on to witness is something he will only ever be able to speak rather than write about.

The Second World War in Europe might be coming to an end, but the real work of putting the pieces of a fractured continent back together is only just beginning. Sam and the other soldiers newly arrived from Britain have been fortunate enough to miss most of the war's major events, from Dunkirk to the liberation of the Nazi-run concentration camps. Yet many civilians who have survived are displaced, including ethnically German Poles forcibly sent from Poland to Germany.

Although the British forces will later be lauded for their heroism and bravery in bringing the war to an end, Sam's experiences in the aftermath of the conflict tell a different story. One of the worst experiences of Sam's life involves having to watch his fellow allied soldiers take revenge against the Germans in their care, treating many of them with rough and often brutal hostility.

For the rest of his life, Sam will remain tight-lipped about his role in the carnage around him. When his son Peter later tries to ask him if he killed anyone, his response is simply that the army taught him 'how to use a gun'.

The unavoidable violence of conflict is traumatic for the 21-year-old, but it hardens his already burgeoning political sensibilities. Unlike many of his peers, Sam's wartime experiences turn him away from any sense of militarism, jingoism or hostility to other Europeans, even when it

becomes a major feature of British political life. The need to see the best in everyone, even those he is taught to regard as 'the enemy', will become a significant aspect of his personality.

Yet his time in Germany is also immensely positive on several fronts. For the first time, he is free from the demands of family, school and even his superiors in the army. As a result, he can enjoy a full social life - including the possibility of romantic encounters.

Sam befriends some German civilians: the Von Berlepschs and their daughters, Toni and Dorothy, who are very kind to this young man who, like them, is adjusting to a strange new reality in the post-war world. In turn, Sam shares his army rations with them and keeps them entertained with the tunes he teaches himself on the piano or learns from his local music teacher. In his diary, he describes being made to feel like 'one of the family' and regularly comments on how much he likes German people.

He supplements his food rations by trading a box of cigarettes he wins from coming second place in a cross country run. It is a pleasing irony that, as a resolute non-smoker, he is the most likely to get the prize despite being the one who least desires it.

He also has a brief relationship with one of the family's daughters, known as Dotti. While liaisons between soldiers and civilians are not unheard of, they are discouraged, and in the eyes of some Sam's activities can be regarded as

'fraternisation' with the enemy. Yet to anyone who grows to know Sam well, it is a small but clear gesture of non-judgement and peace, a sign of the new world many young people hope for in the aftermath of such a devastating period in history. It is also one of many occasions where he will take pleasure in breaking petty rules.

Decades later when Britain votes to leave the European Union, Sam firmly votes 'Remain' while simultaneously voicing his support for those of his grandchildren whose partners have come from places like Hungary and Poland. These beliefs no doubt have their origins in his wartime experiences.

Sam and the surviving members of his unit remain in Germany until 1947 to help stabilise the country. He returns to England physically unscathed, having grown as a person and tasted luxuries and freedoms he never thought possible. He is one of the people who can comfortably be said to have enjoyed parts of his military service, experiencing travel and a respite from the gruelling manual labour that defines many working-class lives.

In later years, those returning with missing limbs and post-traumatic stress disorder will be seen as having suffered a 'bad war', and many young men will not return home at all. Yet Sam McCabe, if anyone, has had a 'good war', partly through chance, but partly through his own doing.

Life in post-war England will present a whole new set of complications, but the early years of his return are joyful

ones. Reunited with his family in Litherland and armed with a veteran's grant from the government, he ignores the advice given to most demobbed soldiers about spending it on clothes and instead buys a bicycle and a tent. He also takes his mother and siblings on holiday to the south coast of England.

In 1945 a general election is held, one of the most significant in Britain's history. The coalition government of the war years is dissolved. The Labour Party defeats Winston Churchill, who despite his canonisation in later years is an unpopular figure among young men like Sam who want to see the inequalities of previous generations dismantled. Churchill's blue-blooded roots and devotion to maintaining the British Empire and the class system hold little appeal to this idealistic young socialist, and so he joins the huge outpouring of support for Clement Atlee's government.

These are convictions that will stay with him for the rest of his life. He will later come to despise the popular TV drama 'Downton Abbey,' seeing it as glorifying a system that kept working class people in positions of servitude. He will never vote for any party other than Labour.

The years ahead will consist of heavy rationing, and many families will endure immense trauma. Yet a new era of post-war optimism beckons – one that will include educational reforms and an expansion of the welfare state, with those from all class backgrounds granted an unprecedented safety net.

As returning soldiers, Sam and his peers receive a large amount of training and support from the government about their career options. Most of it goes over the 24-year-old's head, in particular the advice about starting a business. However, he does not need to make a decision yet, as unlike any of his ancestors, he will get to continue his education.

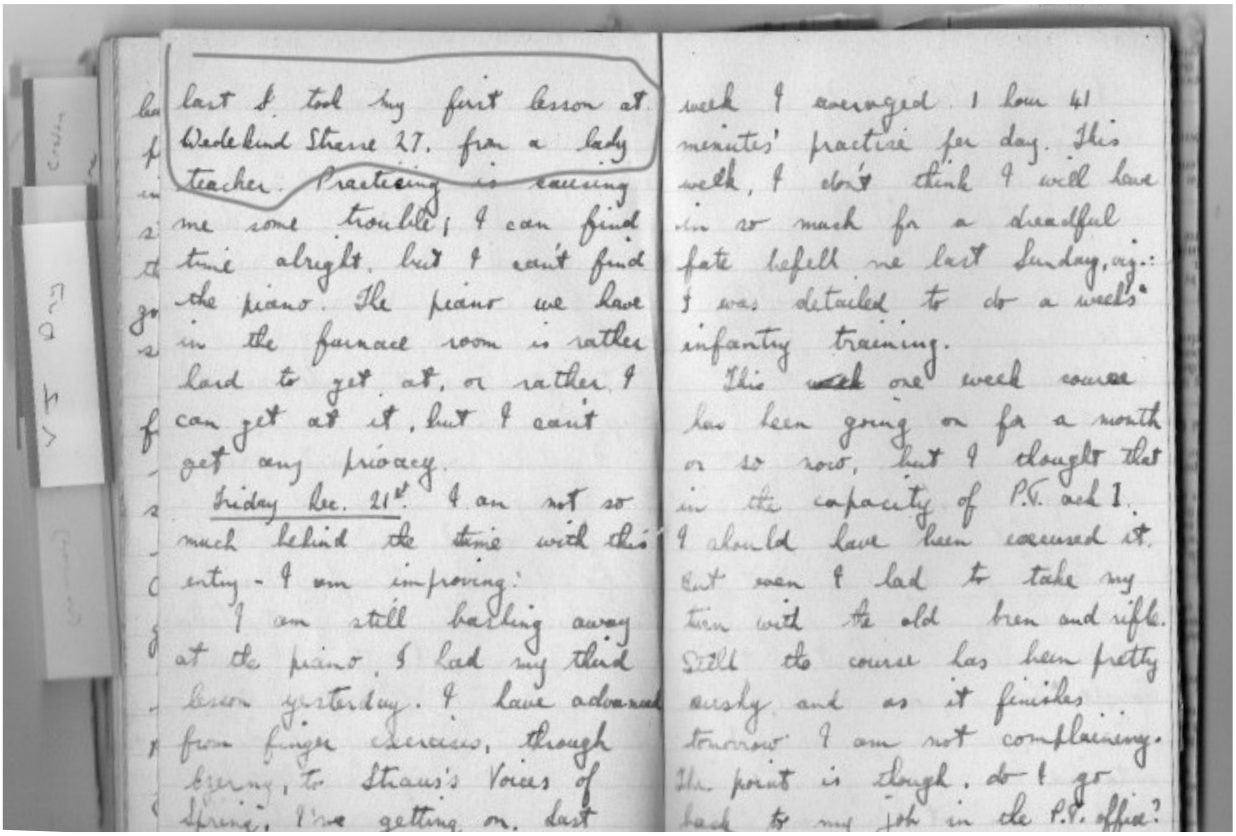
He arrives at the University of Liverpool in September 1948 to study for a 'general degree', with a heavy emphasis on subjects such as Latin and geography. It will be a huge step, in more ways than one.



Sam enjoys a bicycle ride while on active service.



Sam enjoys a camping trip with his German friends, Toni and Dotti.



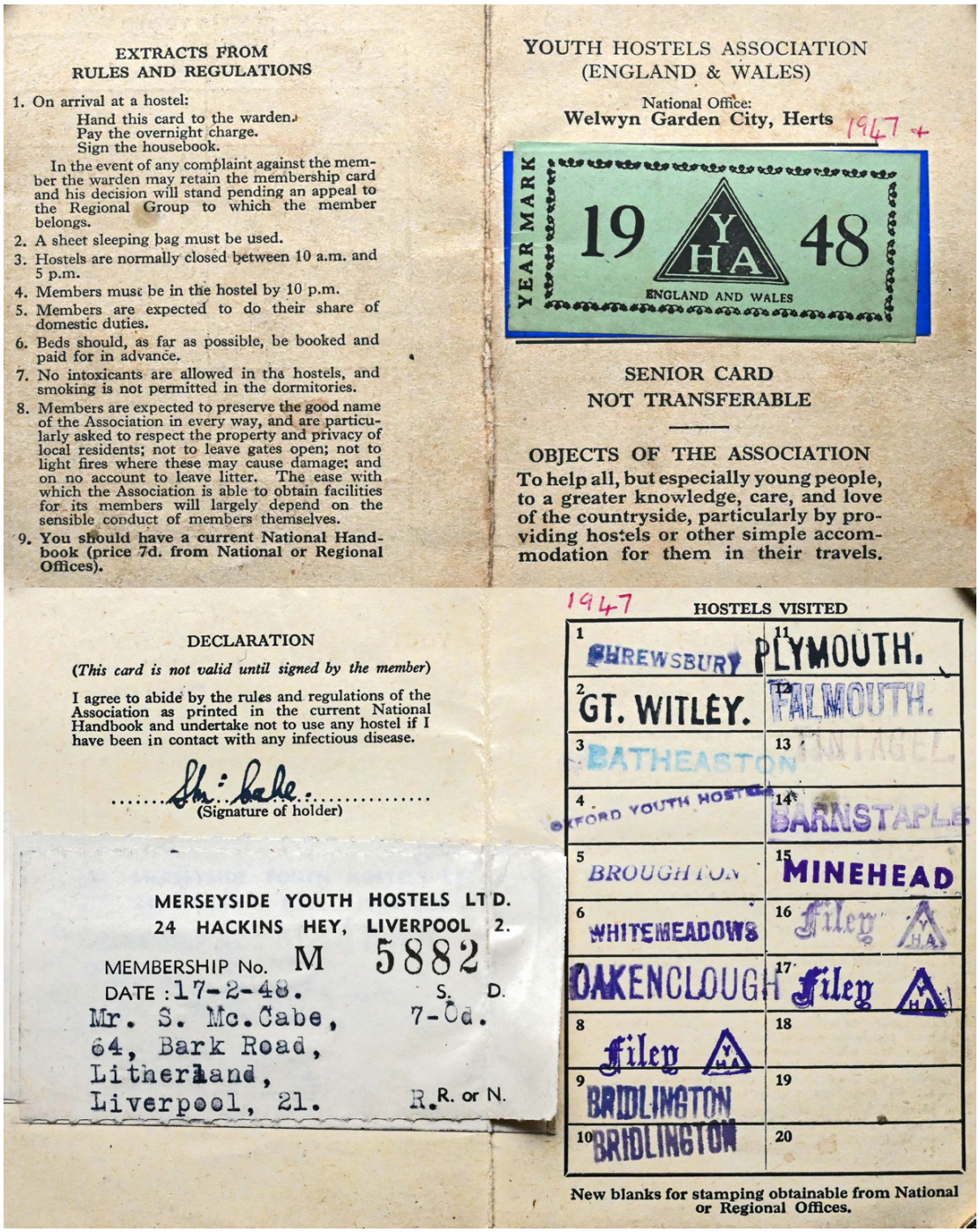
last I took my first lesson at Wedekind Strasse 27. from a lady teacher. Practising is causing me some trouble; I can find time alright, but I can't find the piano. The piano we have in the furnace room is rather hard to get at, or rather I can get at it, but I can't get any privacy.

Friday Dec. 21st. I am not so much behind the time with this entry - I am improving.

I am still hacking away at the piano. I had my third lesson yesterday. I have advanced from finger exercises, though boring, to Strauss's Voices of Spring. I've getting on. last week I averaged 1 hour 41 minutes' practice per day. This week, I don't think I will have in so much for a dreadful fate befell me last Sunday, viz.: I was detailed to do a week's infantry training.

This ~~week~~ one week course has been going on for a month or so now, but I thought that in the capacity of P.T. and I. I should have been excused it. But soon I had to take my turn with the old bren and rifle. Still the course has been pretty easy and as it finishes tomorrow I am not complaining. The point is though, do I go back to my job in the P.T. office?

A page from Sam's wartime journal, written in 1945. He prefers piano lessons to 'Infantry Training'.



EXTRACTS FROM
RULES AND REGULATIONS

1. On arrival at a hostel:
   Hand this card to the warden.
   Pay the overnight charge.
   Sign the housebook.
   In the event of any complaint against the member the warden may retain the membership card and his decision will stand pending an appeal to the Regional Group to which the member belongs.
2. A sheet sleeping bag must be used.
3. Hostels are normally closed between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.
4. Members must be in the hostel by 10 p.m.
5. Members are expected to do their share of domestic duties.
6. Beds should, as far as possible, be booked and paid for in advance.
7. No intoxicants are allowed in the hostels, and smoking is not permitted in the dormitories.
8. Members are expected to preserve the good name of the Association in every way, and are particularly asked to respect the property and privacy of local residents; not to leave gates open; not to light fires where these may cause damage; and on no account to leave litter. The ease with which the Association is able to obtain facilities for its members will largely depend on the sensible conduct of members themselves.
9. You should have a current National Handbook (price 7d. from National or Regional Offices).

YOUTH HOSTELS ASSOCIATION
(ENGLAND & WALES)

National Office:
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OBJECTS OF THE ASSOCIATION

To help all, but especially young people, to a greater knowledge, care, and love of the countryside, particularly by providing hostels or other simple accommodation for them in their travels.

DECLARATION

(*This card is not valid until signed by the member*)

I agree to abide by the rules and regulations of the Association as printed in the current National Handbook and undertake not to use any hostel if I have been in contact with any infectious disease.

S. Mc. Cabe.
(Signature of holder)

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4

EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

Life in the late '40s and early '50s still comes with heavy restrictions, regardless of the new government-backed opportunities that exist for those who survived the war. The social lives of the men and women at the University of Liverpool are conducted according to strict moral codes, particularly in terms of any romantic attachments they make. It will take at least another decade for these to start lifting.

For Sam, this is another period in his life where he gets to enjoy strange new freedoms. He befriends a group of Catholic students at the university's RC chaplaincy. They include Ronnie, Ken and Tim, a gang that will become life-long friends to Sam, united by a love of going on cycling, camping and hiking trips whenever they are not studying.

A significant part of life at the chaplaincy is the expectation that the students will meet their future wives and husbands there. Ronnie, Ken and Tim will fulfil this expectation by going on to marry fellow Catholics Moira, Sheila and Kath.

One encounter leads to Sam meeting Agnes Conroy, a fellow geography student, from Yorkshire, who is there on a scholarship. Like him, she is from a large Anglo-Irish family – indeed, her father is briefly convicted and imprisoned in Dartmoor for his role in an arson attack on the docks of the South Tyneside town of Jarrow during a stint with the IRA.

Unlike Sam, her background by the standards of the time is staunchly middle-class, with both her parents' university-educated and her father a headteacher. Initially, this is of little consequence to either of them; they both enjoy the outdoors, especially cycling trips to the Wirral, and Sam, who loves music, is attracted to the fact that Agnes can sing. From her perspective, Sam being five years her senior makes him seem like someone with 'life experience' who could be a good provider.

Yet in a country still riddled by class tensions, youth and passion will not be enough to distract the two from their wildly different upbringings and the expectations that come with them.

In keeping with the social mores of the time, their courtship is strictly chaste. Agnes lives with a group of other female students in a cloister run by nuns, with the expectation that she will be home early each night, alone. She experiences low self-confidence, often confiding to her diary that she is worried about her looks and clothing.

However, her days are brightened by the postcards she receives from Sam, sent from the remote locations where his

excursions with friends take him, found years later by their daughters. He entertains her by drawing stick figures that act out the various scenarios he finds himself in, such as getting wet and lost and losing his boots. They are warmly received, even if they contain little hint of passion or affection.

Their courtship is ultimately a happy one, and before long, there is talk of marriage. Agnes graduates in 1950 and begins training to be a geography teacher at a college in Liverpool run by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, starting her first job at a Roman Catholic school in Wigan.

Sam graduates in 1951. Marriage is still a few years away as the couple need to save money, which in the meantime places Sam in the alarming position of having to make a major decision about his future. This is unprecedented for a man who since his school days has almost always had decisions made for him.

This passive tendency never quite goes away. In later life, he will develop a reputation for standing apart from the chaos around him, rarely choosing a side and letting others take the blame for any necessary or unpleasant decisions.

Yet on the cusp of marriage and by implication, fatherhood, he knows the only person who can make a decision about his future is him. So he cycles around the country looking for work, taking up fruit picking in Evesham and teaching English to Hungarian refugees in Lincolnshire. During this time he visits Agnes when she is back with her parents in the Yorkshire village of Thrybergh, cycling all the way

from Lincoln and back in a day, on roads largely free from cars. He eventually realises that teaching is for him too, and follows Agnes into pedagogy.

His time in teacher training is challenging, as he cuts his teeth in several tough schools in Liverpool, including St Anthony's on Scotland Road, which will later become notable for having educated the celebrated scouse entertainer Cilla Black.

He ultimately settles on becoming a primary school teacher while Agnes goes down the secondary teaching route. They eventually tie the knot on 25th July 1955, during a very simple ceremony at St Gerard's Church in Thrybergh.

Although she is glad that he will bring her grandchildren, Sam's mother Martha feels out of place at the wedding, finding she has little in common with Agnes's more well-to-do parents, Ethelreda and James Conroy. Again, this is merely a temporary glitch, but it will start to cause problems between both sides further down the line.

Shortly after the wedding, Sam secures a permanent post at a Catholic primary school in the picturesque village of Wardour on the Wiltshire–Dorset border. In 1956 the couple's first children, twin daughters Margaret and Sheila, are born.

The second great tragedy of Sam's life happens at this point. At five months old Sheila, the younger twin, dies from a heart condition. In an era when infant mortality is not

uncommon, there is little support available for the couple, and they are given no space to grieve.

The demands of working and running a household with only basic amenities means that Sam and Agnes are compelled to suppress their sadness and get on with raising their young family. However, consolation for their loss arrives soon in the form of Cecilia (born in 1957), followed by Peter (1958), Helen (1960) and twins Frances and Rachel (1962).

Life in rural Dorset is simple but satisfying. Sam enjoys his job, getting to know all the children and developing a reputation as a gentle, supportive presence who disavows corporal punishment and wants children to develop by doing rather than through rote-learning facts. His own children enjoy the freedom and safety offered from growing up in a rural environment and attending a small school with a strong sense of community.

Once there are more than three children, the motorbike and side-car Sam has been using for transport is upgraded to the family's first car: a green 1940s Rover with running boards and a sunshine roof. The family particularly enjoy trips to the seaside towns of Swanage, Poole and Sandbanks, which are all a short drive away, whenever the car can make it without breaking down. Sam is handy with a starting handle and a selection of home-spun tools for repairs, while Agnes manages picnics, buckets and spades, spare clothes, nappies and inevitably at least one child in a carrycot. Occasionally a

visiting aunt lends assistance.

Their lifestyle has its challenges. Raising a family of 6 in a small council house is a familiar scenario for Sam but a shock to Agnes, who expected that marrying a teacher would mean a life of middle-class respectability and comfort. Although the house has electricity and an indoor bathroom, the only sources of heat are a coal fire in the living room and a solid fuel range for cooking. There is no fridge, and clothes have to be laundered using a twin tub and mangle.

The older children, however, remember it as a golden age, full of sunshine and laughter. Sam lets Margaret and Cecilia stand on the front seat of the car and ride with their heads out of the sunshine roof on their way back from school, with no seat belts required. On these car journeys he enjoys making up stories, with Cecilia, Margaret and Peter remembering tales such as 'The Big Red Engine' and 'The Magic Bed' being re-told on multiple occasions.

There is soon growing pressure on Sam to secure a better salary and buy a house for his sizable family. He eventually succumbs, accepting a teaching job at St Ethelbert's School in the maligned industrial town of Slough in Berkshire. It will be a shock to the system for the whole family, in more ways than one.

To avoid living in Slough – a place the poet John Betjeman infamously describes as 'not fit for humans now' – the family relocate to the pretty, riverside Buckinghamshire town of Marlow in 1963. Agnes enjoys life there, feeling less isolated

than in Dorset, although Sam dislikes his commute.

Despite his long drive into work, Sam cannot deny that he has found his vocation, and many of those around him seem to agree. He teaches in small schools, allowing him to get to know most of the children and their families. With the national curriculum decades away, he has free rein over what and how he teaches and continues to implement his philosophy of getting children to learn by doing rather than just through intensive study. He is popular with the whole school community, and as before, he never uses the cane.

His own children are not so lucky, and the older McCabe children do not enjoy their education as much as those in their father's school. Margaret and Cecilia are uprooted from their idyllic countryside school in Dorset and along with their younger brother are despatched to St Peter's, a strict Catholic establishment in Marlow overseen by a cruel head teacher, Mrs Livingstone. The cane is in constant use. Although all three are bright, none can be said to thrive. Cecilia will later describe her time there as 'learning through fear.'

Holidays are when the family really unites. At first it is during the long drives up to Scotland in hastily re-constructed cars, and later on the slightly shorter drives to a rented cottage in the Lake District. Agnes and Sam's relationship thrives on holiday, with both adoring the family picnics and sing-songs which pass the time on long journeys. Sam makes up his own songs including a rendition of 'Land

of Hope and Glory' that starts as 'Land of Sand and Water, we'll picnic by a tree, Mum will make the sandwiches, Dad will make the tea'… and ending with 'though we have no chicken, we still have jam and bread'.

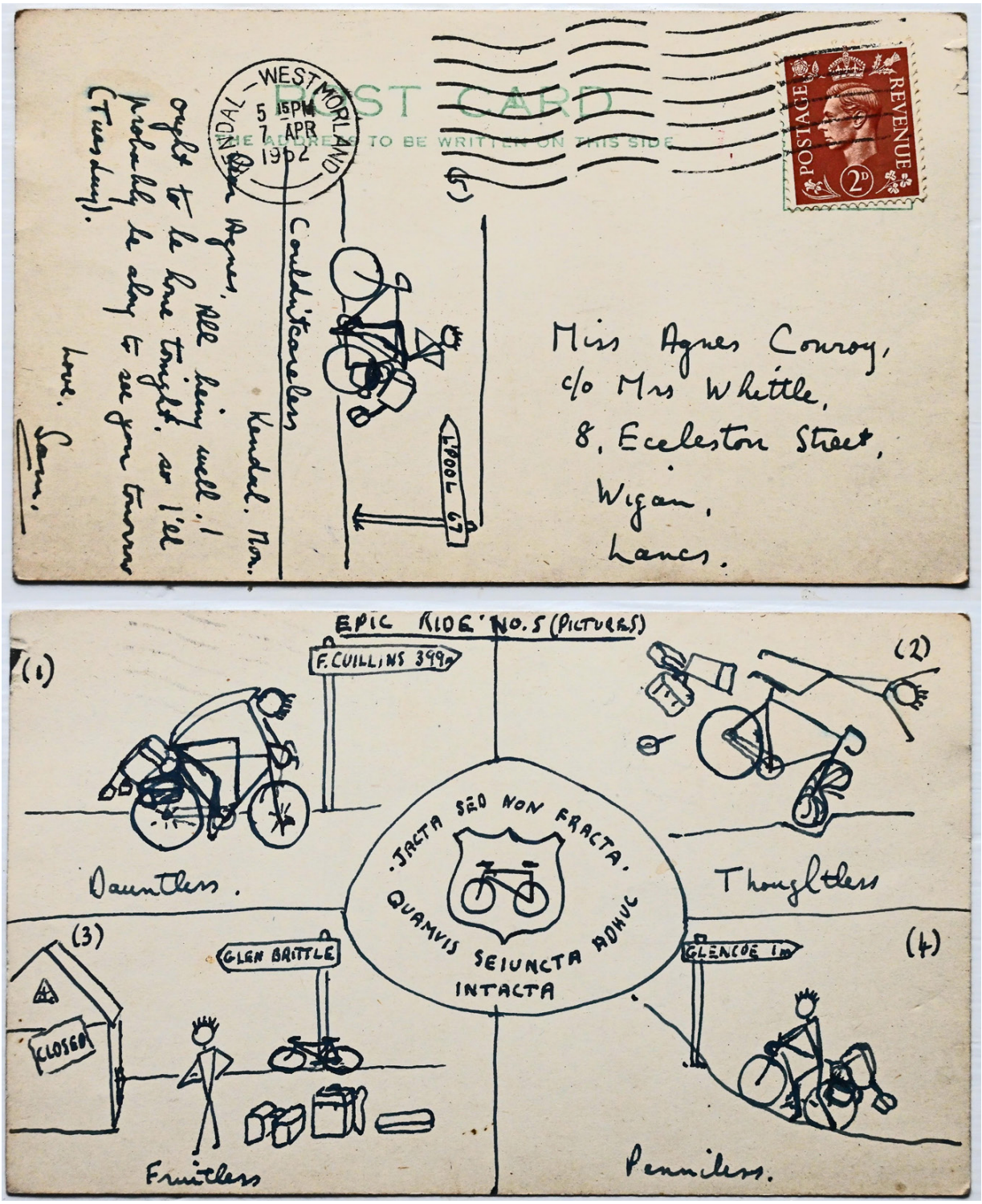
Yet tragedy strikes again in 1965. Agnes and Sam receive a telegram bringing the awful news that Agnes's younger sister Kathleen has been killed in a San Francisco car crash at the age of 29.

Kathleen had been a sign of the changing times, refusing to 'settle down' and managing to travel as a single woman to the USA and enjoy a hedonistic 1960s lifestyle in San Francisco before her tragic demise.

This is the world in which the McCabe children come of age. The times are rapidly a-changing, but their parents do not embrace it with open arms. As outside events encroach, the innocent days of childhood begin to fade, and the chances of the family staying happily together rapidly diminish.



Happy Days! Ken, Agnes, Moira and Sam on a 1950s cycle ride to The Wirral.



Postcard sent by Sam to Agnes while she was in her first year of teaching in Wigan.



Sam and Agnes's wedding, 1955. L to R: Marie, Kathleen, Pat, Jim, Martha, Ken, Sam, Agnes, James, Ethelreda, Vin, Angela, Joan, Sheila



Sheila in hospital around 4 months old.

5

SOME EYES GO WANDERING

The 1960s brings many changes to modern Britain, but one of the most immediate for the family is the rising rate of inflation. One year, in order to pay for the petrol to drive the family to Scotland, Sam takes a holiday job driving a baker's van. Keen to make the best of it, he remembers how hard blue-collar work is and feels grateful for his luck.

As the cost of feeding and clothing their brood becomes increasingly onerous, Agnes feels under pressure to go to work, something she has not done since her marriage, and that her mother never had to do.

'My wife does not have to work' is the proud mantra of many men of the time. Yet a life defined by the Women's Institute and volunteering for good causes will not be Agnes' path. In 1967 when Frances and Rachel start school, she accepts a part-time position as a geography teacher at Altwood, a secondary modern school in the nearby town of Maidenhead. Later on she works at Piper's Corner, a private

girls' school near High Wycombe. She grows to dislike teaching geography and eventually moves into teaching English as a foreign language.

For her entire marriage Agnes maintains control, managing the domestic duties and the household budget while finding time to go to work. Sam remains stubbornly unworldly, preferring to watch football and add various extensions to the house – some of which are needed, others less so. He notably builds a boat that doubles up as a roof rack for the car, to carry the luggage on family holidays.

Football is a constant presence in the McCabe household. Liverpool, Sam and the children's favourite team, win the FA Cup in 1965 and England famously win the World Cup in 1966. Sam regularly meets his brothers to watch Liverpool or Everton when they are playing in London - including for the 1965 final - and watches other Cup Finals live on television with great excitement.

Old friends from Sam's youth flock down to visit and celebrate Liverpool's first FA Cup victory, under the now legendary Bill Shankly, and are present for the memorable incident where Sam breaks his flask of tea in excitement over the team's second goal.

Cecilia finds the affiliation, the cheering and celebrating a lot more exciting than the sewing and knitting she is encouraged to do. When Peter reaches the age of 8 he is allowed to accompany his father but the girls, despite their enthusiasm, are not considered.

Regardless of Sam's kindness and gentleness as a father and teacher and his unusually progressive outlook on education, gender equality is never something he will embrace. At the Wardour school only the boys accompany him on a camping trip to North Wales, and he clings doggedly to his belief that women with young children should not go out to work. There is a paradoxical pressure for all the children to be extremely academic, even though neither parent approves of the five girls having careers.

As the decade continues the McCabe daughters start to resent this unequal treatment. Among other things, it is a decade that will see homosexuality and abortion decriminalised and the contraceptive pill made widely available, albeit at first only to married women. But instead of embracing these changes, the McCabes double down on ensuring their children never stray from the Roman Catholic dogmas of the time on morality and sex.

At the end of their primary education, all the children pass the 11 plus exam, which will allow them to progress to one of the county's many grammar schools. The most convenient option for the girls would be to attend Wycombe High School, which is closer to Marlow and would allow them to attend school with many of their friends from St Peter's.

Sam and Agnes, however, have other plans. In 1968, on receiving a letter confirming that Cecilia has been accepted to Wycombe High, Sam writes many letters to the

chief education officer for the county. He pleads that all his daughters be allowed to attend St Bernard's Convent School, a Catholic grammar school in Slough that Margaret is already enrolled in, having unusually and remarkably passed the 11 plus at the age of nine.

He is granted his wish, and all five girls eventually attend the school, with travel allowances provided to ease the financial burden on the family. Slough is a considerable distance from Marlow, and in one fell swoop, Sam knowingly or otherwise condemns his daughters to an even worse commute than him. The girls are forced to take a bus and three trains to school, combined with a one-mile walk, on days when Sam cannot drive them.

With no Catholic boys' schools in striking distance, Peter is allowed to attend the local grammar school, Sir William Borlase. Both schools will eventually become co-educational, but not until the late '80s.

Even by the standards of the era, where few teachers in any school share Sam's more child-centred approach, St Bernard's is an old-fashioned institution. In an ominous echo of Sam's education, a generation earlier, the convent forbids its pupils from having any contact with boys, sex education is virtually non-existent, and, despite its high academic pedigree, the school provides little guidance on the complexities of life. Suitable careers for girls are considered to be teaching, secretarial work, nursing, finding a husband or, as a last resort, taking the veil.

In the minds of the nuns and many parents, including Sam and Agnes, the rigours of Catholic education are meant to provide enduring stability in a rapidly changing world. Yet for the pupils, the strict rules make the typical teenage pursuits of pop music, alcohol and drugs more and more alluring. As the '60s slide into the '70s, their studies will take second place to the distractions beyond the school wall.

The family still enjoys amazing holidays. Spurred on by the extra money from Agnes' work, and after too many damp summers in Wales, they venture off to France. The boat on the roof of the car carries all the camping equipment, and a near disaster happens on one campsite when Sam is atop the car loading up the bedding and tents. He loses his balance and the unsecured boat surfs off the roof, over the long bonnet and onto the fortunately soft grass. Sam manages to stay upright, and a nearby group of French spectators cheer in support.

The holidays cannot last long forever, however, and the McCabes quickly find they are unprepared for a life with six teenagers who are all turning out to be very different people. Sam copes by diving further into his professional life – and not just in terms of teaching.

His career continues to flourish, and he becomes a head teacher at Our Lady of the Rosary, a Catholic school in the Surrey town of Staines. He becomes more intellectually engaged with Catholic theology as Vatican Two dawns, an era which sees the church embrace various changes –

including the ability of the priest to celebrate Mass while facing the congregation and services being conducted in vernacular languages rather than Latin.

At the same time, the educational changes of the new era are taking hold, including an increased administrative burden on teachers. Sam finds this and his lengthened commute into work cumbersome. His miserable mornings and afternoons in the car, combined with being stuck in a house with six loud and frustrated teenagers whenever he is not working, means he retreats further into himself.

His gentleness means that Sam cannot fully deal with the demands of running a household where discipline rather than whimsy is sometimes needed. He increasingly delegates this to his wife. They all, especially the youngest daughter Rachel, see a similarity to Mr Bennett from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, a book Rachel perhaps unsurprisingly adores.

Fortunately, Agnes is more capable than Mrs Bennett. Like many women of the time, the kitchen is where she spends most of her days, the place where she feeds, clothes, listens to and encourages her brood. In short, she is always there for them.

On the nights when he cannot face the drive home from Staines, Sam stays with the family of Angela Beirne, one of the teachers at the school, who shares a house with her sisters Ursula and Hilda and their elderly mother. He forges a strong bond with Angela, a woman fifteen years his junior,

and chooses to spend more time with her instead of his noisy, rebellious family.

There will never be a consensus among the family about whether their relationship is a physical one. Regardless, most of the McCabes are aware that Sam is having an emotional affair with Angela, and his long absences cause a burgeoning sense of anger and resentment within Agnes. Their many rows start to prompt fears among the children that they will get divorced, causing the atmosphere to become even more tense.

Sam still helps out around the house, and willingly tries his hand at DIY, including installing a central heating system that the children claim resembles the pipes and tubes at the beginning of the 'Monty Python's Flying Circus' sketch show.

Yet he often escapes to his little allotment on the other side of Marlow, travels into London to attend courses on Catholic theology, or goes by himself to the cottage in the Lake District, whose amenities are so basic that Agnes rarely chooses to join him. Here he indulges his love of climbing the nearby mountain Helvellyn, often alone.

In short, he checks out of being a father. But despite the unhappiness on all sides, Catholic marriage proves to be like the Hotel California from the McCabe daughters' record collections: a place where you can 'check out, but never leave'.



Margaret, Cecilia and Peter on the first motorbike, 1960.



A happy day at the seaside, Helen in the foreground.



Thrybergh, 1965 Back: Cecilia, Margaret, Agnes with Frances, Peter. Front: Ethelreda with Helen James Conroy with Rachel.

6

A SCANDAL IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Of all Sam and Agnes's children, by the end of the '70s Peter has become the one with whom tensions are running highest. Having never gelled with the public-school ethos of his all-boys grammar school, he drops out at 18, moving into a flat with friends from his motorcycle gang and finding a job at the local social security offices.

For Sam and Agnes, the idea of their son spurning university is horrifying enough. Yet their deeply conservative Catholic principles will be tested to breaking point when, barely a year later, news starts to filter through that Peter and his girlfriend Sarah, in their unwed state, are expecting a baby. After being bandied indecisively around the siblings, the news eventually reaches their parents.

At this point a fundamental fault line emerges in Sam and Agnes's sense of morality. While no less prudish about sex, Sam's Catholicism is mainly rooted in empathy and forgiveness, pegged to a strong streak of working-class pragmatism about the purpose of marriage. In the world

Sam is from, marriage essentially serves as a social security net for women, ensuring that the men stay around to support their offspring. If pregnancies occur outside of wedlock, the principle of 'it takes a village to raise a child' kicks in.

For Agnes, a sense of propriety will often trump compassion. Middle-class respectability, including the strict guidelines on children and marriage that are as common among non-Catholics as Catholics, makes the shame of a grandchild out of wedlock almost too much to bear.

Although Sam calmly adjusts, his wife is devastated. Not even the birth of baby Julie in 1977 leads to a thaw in attitudes, with Agnes crossing over to the other side of the street to avoid Sarah when she sees her out and about in Marlow town centre.

To strain things even further, Peter goes out to work as a window cleaner to support his family, which chafes against Agnes's white-collar expectations for her children. Agnes finds it shameful that her son is in a blue-collar line of work, while her husband, who has done various forms of manual labour before teaching, continues to be pragmatic.

Peter and Sarah are married in the registry office in High Wycombe in 1980 and are joined by another baby, Chris, in March 1982. Cecilia remains unaware of the birth of her nephew, as no one in the family updates her while she is in Taiwan teaching English as a foreign language.

These sleights become too much for Peter and in 1986 he puts his foot down, deciding to cut off all communication

with his mother and any of his sisters he thinks are looking down on his wife or their lifestyle. They all feel hurt by the sudden estrangement.

Julie and Chris are still allowed to see their grandfather, who focuses intently on moving forward with a sense of compassion and forgiveness. Julie never forgets Sam's openness, and with a touch of poetic justice, she will be the first of Sam and Agnes's many grandchildren to produce a great-grandchild, Adam Samuel, 35 years later.

The '80s continues to be a traumatic time for the whole family, but in some ways, Sam makes up for his absences during the previous decade, acting as a bridge between both sides. One notable incident involves Cecilia's boyfriend Tommo, whom Agnes dislikes due to his family living at 'the wrong end' of Marlow's Seymour Park Road, as well as for simply being a male seeking proximity to one of her daughters, without evident intentions of marriage.

Sam finds common ground with Tommo in discussing motorbikes, and when he accidentally catches the two youngsters upstairs, he keeps a diplomatic silence. This sense of flexibility and desire to prioritise relationships over dogma will keep the family together.

Cecilia eventually marries her university-educated boyfriend Graeme Fry in March 1985, after enduring nine months of silent treatment from Agnes when living 'in sin' with him in the London suburb of Muswell Hill in 1983.

The flat is on a walking route to Highgate station that is

notorious for housing the serial killer Dennis Nilson. Agnes appears to be less concerned about this than about the two cohabiting outside of wedlock, perhaps worried that they will be violently murdered before they can leave their state of sin, thus consigning them to whichever part of hell the terminally unmarried go.

During this 'intifada' with her mother Cecilia still enjoys her father's company, helped by the fact that Sam and Agnes attend separate church services. Sam goes to the 9am Mass on Sundays, and Cecilia drops by when Agnes is worshipping during the one at 11am.

Once this unwed state is rectified, Sam finds it hard to conceal his joy, seeing marriage as a 'fairytale ending' for his daughters.

In 1976 at the age of 20, Margaret marries Geoff Wilkerson, a practical man with whom Sam can share a whisky or two, and in time their three children are born: Stephen, who arrives in 1980, followed by Martin in 1983 and Laura in 1987. Two months after Laura's birth, Cecilia, with some help from Graeme, also produces Nicholas (known as Nick).

Sam makes an inadvertent contribution to the arrival of the next grandchild: Cecilia and Graeme over-indulge on his homemade gooseberry wine one quiet evening with the happy result that grandchild number 7, Madeleine (or Maddy) is conceived, swelling the ranks of the McCabe grandchildren. It is 1989 – the same year that Sam retires

from teaching.

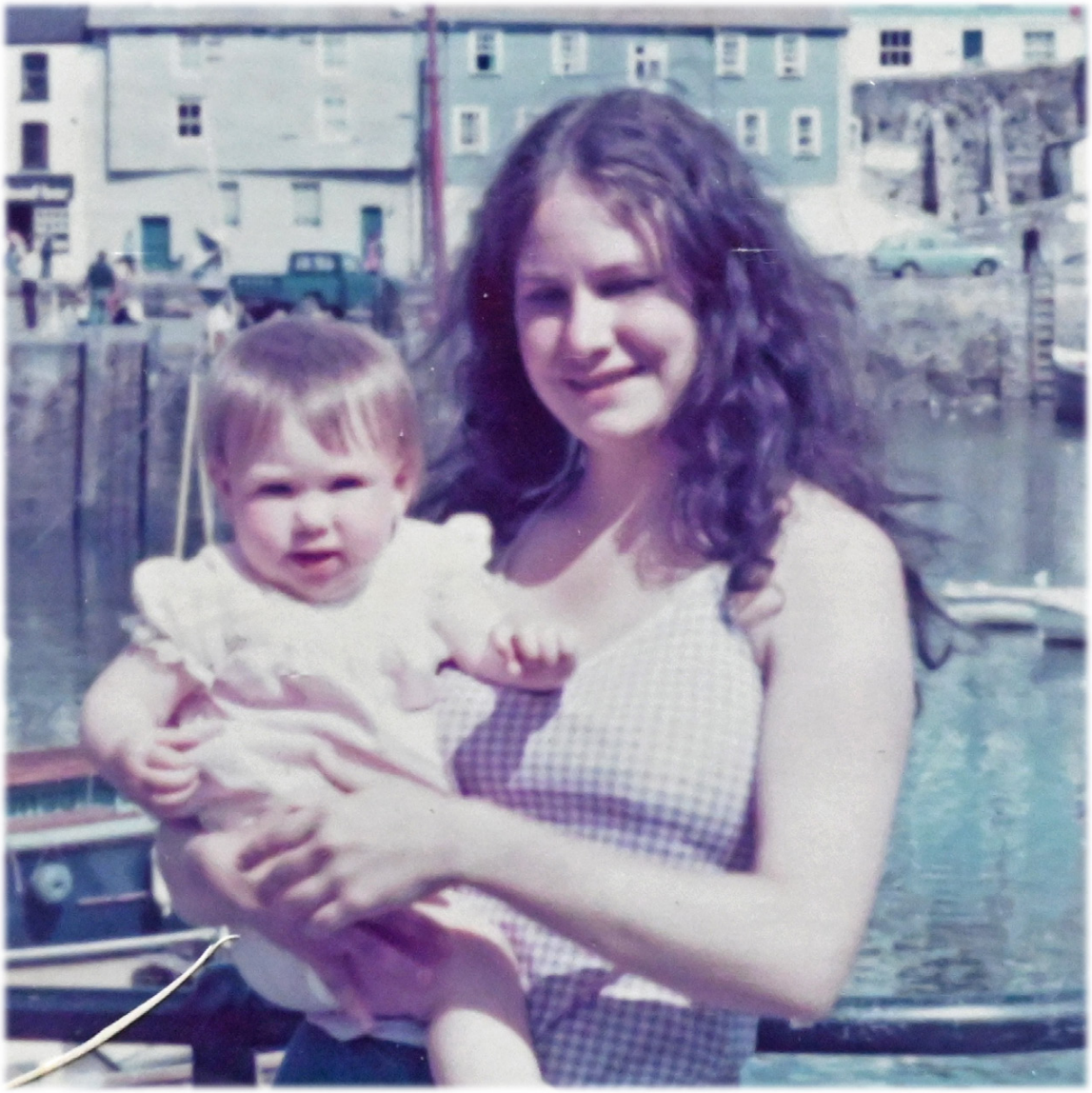
His retirement is surely a considerable source of relief to the local educational authority, whose well-meaning guidance he has deliberately and blissfully remained ignorant of. Yet regardless of his indifference to the national curriculum, Sam's final years of teaching are happy ones. In a lyrical gesture to the brave new world of endless exams that most schools will succumb to, Sam's last act is to get the children, even the girls, of Our Lady of the Rosary to build a pond, including teaching them to mix cement.

In a tender swansong to a world that he perhaps senses is changing for the good as well as the bad, one of Sam's more famous remarks on education will be that '11-year-old girls should rule the world'.

With that, he bows out from teaching, not perfect, but loved and respected by almost every child who has come his way. Few men can boast a better legacy to their profession. Yet the remaining years of his personal life, of which three decades are still left, will be another matter.



Holiday on the Isle of Mull 1977. L to R: Sam, Frances, Rachel, Angela (Agnes' sister), Agnes.



Sarah and Julie on holiday in Cornwall, with Peter, August 1978.

7

TOGETHER AGAIN?

The late '80s and '90s sees an outbreak of harmony for the McCabes. Peter returns to the fold after three years of absence from most of the family, attending a party at Margaret and Geoff's in 1989. In 1987 Sam and Agnes move from 14 Barnhill Road to a two-bedroom residence on Riverpark Drive near Marlow's railway station.

In a sign of the area's attractiveness to those moving out of London, the house in Barnhill Road, which they purchase for £3,000, sells for almost £100,000 – the price for which they buy their new home. This latter house will sell for over half a million pounds in 2018, just over 30 years later.

The advent of a new decade sees more joyful weddings. Frances' marriage to Andy Hull in 1994 is a particularly beautiful occasion, with the bride and groom being transported by boat from St Peter's Church to a reception held at the Marlow rugby club.

Alongside this, at least half of Sam's children have periods where they follow him into education. Peter and Helen both

train to be teachers, and Rachel becomes a passionate and dedicated librarian within a Catholic secondary school in Edinburgh. Frances goes on to work among children with educational needs in her local primary school in Yorkshire.

After a brief stint teaching English abroad, Cecilia decides to train as an accountant, while the more scientifically-minded Margaret becomes a computer programmer.

More grandchildren soon arrive. Helen and her husband Bill produce Joe and Felicity (known as Flick) in 1993 and 1995, and Frances's older children Gareth and Lizzie are born in 1996 and 1997. Emily and Jack are born in 1993 and 1996, sired by Rachel and her partner Norman in Edinburgh, giving rise to many happy holidays for Sam and Agnes in Scotland. The final grandchild, Ruth, will arrive in 2001 to Frances and Andy.

In total, Agnes and Sam find themselves with 14 grandchildren, spanning an age gap of 24 years. For Sam in particular, small children will always be a source of huge joy, and his older grandchildren will be frequent recipients of his varied and original repertoire of stories, games and songs.

Yet his marriage remains a source of tension and dissatisfaction. His daughter Cecilia sees evidence of this in 1992 when she bumps into her father and Angela Beirne, his now long-term acquaintance, while out with her two small children.

Sam's embarrassment at being caught with the woman

everyone has long suspected him of having an affair with is evident. Yet in a gesture of loyalty after he refrained from telling Agnes about her tryst with Tommo over a decade earlier, his daughter does not relay what she sees.

When they encounter him at the weekend for Sunday lunch, Sam casually mentions to little Nick and Maddy that he saw them several days earlier, but they are oblivious to Angela's significance. They do not mention her, and his gamble pays off.

It is not the last time Ms Beirne will appear on the scene.

Sam's natural instinct for being a loner means that he rarely joins the kinds of clubs and societies that others of his generation will turn to for companionship. Outside of family events and Mass at their local church, when Sam is not at home, he mostly grows fruit and vegetables on his allotment and goes for long bike rides up into the picturesque Chiltern Hills. He meets his friends Len, Joe and Brenna on Mondays for lunch. When he and Agnes go on holiday every year, they go with their old university acquaintances Ken, Tim and Ronnie and their wives, Sheila, Kath and Moira to the beautiful Lake District village of Grasmere in Cumbria.

Yet Ms Beirne seems to scratch some unidentifiable itch. He meets her in clandestine fashion for lunch every so often, claiming to a sceptical Agnes that they are just friends.

As time passes, Agnes becomes increasingly rigid and irascible, with almost no sense of humour. The loss of her beloved sister Angela to cancer in 1991 possibly contributes

to her losing any zest for life. Loved by everyone, particularly Agnes, Angela's death is a blow that leaves the family reeling and robs Agnes of a best friend and confidant in her old age, especially when her and Sam's relationship is under strain.

It is also possible that Agnes' temperament is a hangover from a bout of rheumatic fever several decades ago. The notion of being 'on the autistic spectrum' would have been unfamiliar in Agnes's childhood, and as a result, she will never be diagnosed as such.

Yet these tendencies clash ever more overtly with Sam's gentleness, dry wit and fondness for telling stories. It is likely that Ms Beirne gives him an emotional and intellectual connection that he rarely finds at home.

The question of whether his behaviour is fair to Angela, let alone to Agnes, is a problematic one. By keeping in contact with her, Sam maybe feeds her belief that he will one day leave his wife and move in permanently with her. In doing so, he perhaps prevents her from marrying someone else and having a family of her own.

No one beyond the two will ever truly know the answer to this – but Angela's presence at Sam's funeral in 2017 is, perhaps, the only answer needed.



Graeme with little Nick and Maddy, Sam and Agnes on the right, circa 1991.



Sam and bike, circa 2000



Sam and Agnes in the Lake District, early 2000s.

8

THE BEST OF GRANDADS AND THE BEST OF MEN

Teaching primary school children is Sam's vocation. It is a stroke of good fortune in a world where many of those he has grown up with in the slums of Liverpool are forced to accept whatever job will allow them to support their families. But perhaps his other great vocation is fatherhood and, by extension, grand-fatherhood.

His grandchildren's memories of him are numerous and often glowing, depicting a man of tenderness and compassion, one blessed with an unusually calm temperament and an almost limitless imagination.

Cecilia's daughter Maddy remembers his patience and kindness when, during a holiday in Wales, her night-based terrors caused by the presence of numerous arachnids are mollified by Sam shining a torch in every crevice to check that all the spiders have been ejected. He also assures her that if she cannot sleep, she is welcome to wake him up to say hello – a source of great comfort when her parents'

patience wears thin.

He refuses to show any anger when she spills the eggs that he is trying to teach her to scramble, focusing instead on the excitement of finding a replacement egg with rare twin yolks. Similarly, he remarks on her bringing good luck when she stops by during a cricket game just as Sam and the others find a lost ball.

Perhaps most exciting of all, he sets up a makeshift cinema in the garden shed, a building known as *La Hacienda*, made of brick instead of wood and containing an old projector. Sam uses this to show Nick and Maddy black and white cartoons of *Gumby* and *Popeye the Sailor Man*, before which they are each given half a Mars Bar and a makeshift cinema ticket featuring Sam's trademark stick-figure drawings.

To say that some of his small grandchildren are creatures of habit would be an understatement. Yet without fail, Sam allows them to watch the same episodes of *Winnie the Pooh*, *Noggin the Nog*, *The Wombles* and *The Magic Roundabout* incessantly, using a compilation built up over many years on an old VHS tape.

Whenever he can drag them away from the television, Sam tries to instil them with the autodidact tendencies he has carried with him since childhood. He teaches them to play the glockenspiel, the mouth organ, the kazoo and the Jew's Harp – just a few of the many musical instruments he keeps in a large wooden box next to the upright piano. He loves singing and he will often lead the children in renditions

of 'Liverpool Lullaby' (made famous by Cilla Black) and the theme tune from 'Dad's Army,' his favourite TV series. His duet with Maddy of the sea shanty 'Paddy Lay Back' become a fixture at family gatherings.

Margaret's daughter Laura recounts the games of Pontoon that becomes a fixture of Sam and Agnes's yearly visits to rural Herefordshire each Christmas. If he ever loses, Sam will pretend to shoot himself with a toy revolver, to the amusement and delight of the children assembled.

Many of the grandchildren recall being taken to his allotment to pick grapes, chop wood and light fires. Among their memories is one notable incident where he pours too much paraffin onto a bed of lit grass and narrowly avoids burning down the whole patch of land and those inhabiting it.

It is a clever sleight of hand on Sam's part that, like many of those he educated, his grandchildren's excitement about being allowed to run wild with axes and matches means that what amounts to manual labour is re-fashioned as the height of fun and excitement. Sam pays tribute to this each Christmas at Margaret and Geoff's house, always eating one Brussels sprout to honour his grandchildren's endeavours, despite his dislike of the vegetable being legendary.

Yet time on the allotment is not all hard work. Cecilia's son Nick fondly remembers his grandfather bringing out a piece of wartime kit, a 'kelly kettle,' in which he heats up lemonade for the children to drink, occasionally lacing it

with a dash or two of scotch. Nick eventually inherits the kelly kettle, as well as, in his own words, a love of 'DIY, making fires and hard liquor.'

The joy Sam gives to his grandchildren is sometimes a refuge from their chaotic family lives, especially as their parents' marriages start to crumble.

In the early '90s, after a fall from a ladder ends his window-cleaning career Peter becomes a mature student at Oxford University, studying politics, philosophy and economics before going into teacher training. It is during this time that he meets Karen and leaves his wife, Sarah. Despite their belief that marriage is for life, Sam and Agnes soon overlook this and welcome Karen into the fold far more than they ever did Sarah, the mother of their grandchildren.

They show little charity towards Helen, who is treated with disbelief after her two failed marriages. One is in the '80s, lasting for less than two years, and the other is in the early 2000s, when she leaves her husband Bill and takes the two children with her to a refuge.

The 2000s also see the breakdown of Cecilia and Rachel's relationships. Although infidelity and physical abuse (in Rachel's case) from their partners plays a role in ending their marriages, Sam and Agnes find this hard to stomach. Agnes, in particular, views only a narrow moral side of it, regarding the breakdown of their marriages as a tragedy on a par with both daughters having died.

As the children grow up, Agnes makes it clear that there

is a hierarchy of favourites among them. Peter receives special treatment for being the only son, while Margaret and Frances are favoured for their unbroken marriages and continual attendance at Mass, as well as for sending their children to Catholic schools. Agnes, never over-burdened with subtlety, rarely tries to hide this, so it remains a cause of resentment among the rest of their children for decades.

Despite sharing most of his wife's views, Sam tries to gloss over her criticisms, treating all the children equally and focusing on playing with the grandchildren.

When Cecilia and Graeme briefly reconcile in 2008, Sam is delighted. Yet it is telling that during a family gathering after Cecilia first breaks the news of the marriage ending, Agnes gives Graeme the cold shoulder while Sam still goes up and shakes his hand. Even when his principles are under considerable strain, he tries to see the best in people at all times.



Joan's 80th birthday, circa 2010. Back: Vin and Sam. Front: Anne, Joan and Marie.



Left to right: Margaret, Sam, Martin, Geoff, Cecilia, Nick, Karen. circa 1998.

9

I BELIEVE IN GOD, BUT I DON'T BOTHER HIM

As the 1990s give way to a new century, Sam is forced to contend with the fact that he is no longer a young man. Although he is fitter and healthier than many of his peers, being a cycling and walking non-smoker, the final two decades of his life will see his health start to decline.

He accepts this with a stoicism that is perhaps born of his constant belief in God. It is a belief that changes as he gets older, often in ways that clash with the other Catholics around him.

During a profound conversation with his daughter Cecilia while walking in the Lake District in the early 2000s, Sam explains that he has what might be called a deist view, believing in the presence of a divine creator that loves those he creates, but in whose lives he does not interfere. An outworking of this is that Sam does not pray, memorably claiming that 'if prayer worked, Buckfast Abbey (a Catholic

monastery in Devon) would be top of the Premiership'.

This causes consternation among members of his tribe, including his wife and brother-in-law Jim, who believe far more in following Catholic dogmas to the hilt. By contrast, Sam places far more emphasis on reading many of the major spiritual thinkers, from St Augustine to C.S. Lewis, and coming to his own conclusions, even if this means rejecting some elements of the catechism he was raised to believe in.

That said, he still enjoys the social side of attending Mass and continues to reject ecumenism even while Agnes moves towards it. He remains steadfast in his belief that Roman Catholicism is distinct from other denominations and faiths due to the thread of continuity provided by the papal succession.

Furthermore, he has a unique attitude to spending time abroad. The traumas he witnesses in Europe during the Second World War will leave him with a lasting dislike of travel – an unusual trait in someone so dynamic and intellectually curious.

Some notable exceptions include a trip to British Columbia in Canada to visit another old university friend, Tom. Sam loves this trip due to the abundance of mountains in the country's topography and tolerates the flight by watching the moving map of the plane's location for the whole journey. Visits to northern Spain and Connemara are by ferry and he agrees to occasionally fly to other parts of Spain for the sake of his grandchildren.

On the whole, he favours camping and climbing in the Highlands or the Lake District, preferring to be somewhere he can ride his bicycle, and later on his motorbike. He never visits his brother Charlie in Australia, only seeing him when he makes return visits to the UK. Even when news of Charlie's heart attack 'down under' reaches them in 1993, Sam is not tempted to travel for the funeral.

Sam's interest in motorbikes has a playfully shrewd element. When he tastes rebellion he finds it too hard to turn down, even if, much like his seditious teenage trip to the cinema, he knows he will invoke the ire of greater powers than he – in this case, his wife.

When Agnes joins a church trip to Israel and Palestine, Sam quietly relishes having the house to himself. In a fit of independent thought, he takes advantage of her temporary absence to purchase a new motorbike, telling people that because she is returning from the Holy Land she cannot possibly be angry.

Not for the first time, his gamble pays off; Agnes, fresh from having had a wonderful time in the Holy Land, grimly accepts the motorbike. Sam manages to hang on to it for several years and gets as far as planning a camping trip to Scotland on two wheels. However, his increasing arthritis and some very poor weather mean he is unable to complete the trip.

After a few minor accidents where the motorbike falls on

top of him, Sam is forced to hand it over to Peter, the only other motorcyclist in the family. It is a sign of something few around him wish to think about – his inevitable decline.



Sam looking at Catsyecam and Helvellyn, 2001.



Julie and Gareth's Wedding, 2011.



50th Wedding Anniversary, Marlow 2005. Left to right: Sam, Margaret, Cecilia, Frances, Peter, Rachel, Helen, Agnes.

10

YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE

The 2000s show a slow end to Sam's life as he knows it. He continues to be healthier than many of his peers, avoiding cancer or diabetes and pursuing a passionately active lifestyle. Yet this also turns out to be his undoing.

In 2007, at the age of 83, he has an accident during a bike ride that lands him in the Royal Berkshire Hospital with a head wound requiring stitches, exacerbated by his refusal to wear a helmet.

Problems with his knee deprive him of the pleasure of walking the Fells in the Lake District, so in 2006 he has his first replacement knee operation. However the benefits only last a few years, and in 2011 while walking across a bridge in Budapest his knee plate slips. He cannot walk pain-free and his days of long-distance hiking are over. Yet he draws pleasure from going on short walks, even if they are only from the house to Marlow High Street.

Eventually cycling has to go too. For the final seven years

of his life, Sam's balance issues prevent him from riding a road bike. The purchase of a large adult tricycle never quite makes up for it, but he tries to stay positive.

Memory loss issues start to set in around the time of his 90th birthday in 2014. Yet even in moments where he has to do something he thoroughly dislikes, such as walking with a stick or being pushed in a wheelchair, his sense of enthusiasm when seeing his children and grandchildren never wavers. He is equally thrilled to be a great-grandfather to Alexander (Stephen's son), and Adam and Zara (Julie's son and daughter).

In February 2015 he collapses from a stroke and is admitted to a hospital in Slough. The resultant scans show vascular dementia and an infection in his lungs which is diagnosed as bronchial pneumonia. A no-resuscitation order is agreed on by Agnes and supported by Peter and Margaret.

Miraculously, after a dose of antibiotics he starts to recover. He spends one month in a coma, and after five weeks of saying nothing, he responds to news that Liverpool will be playing Aston Villa in the next round of the FA Cup with a whole sentence, remarking that 'Aston Villa are not very good'. Ironically, Aston Villa go on to win the match.

His recovery is only partial, and he is unable to perform basic tasks without the help of a carer. In September 2017, he suffers another stroke not long after surviving a bout of shingles. Once again, he survives, but only for a short while.

Unable to be transported home, Sam is moved to a private room in High Wycombe hospital. He slides into unconsciousness with his wife, children and grand-daughter Julie around him, and dies on 7th November 2017.

Despite his lack of belief in prayer and his dislike of Catholicism's emphasis on the redemptive power of suffering, Sam's belief in heaven remains steadfast throughout his ordeals. The living room contains many photos of those he knows who have passed on, and before his death he regularly comments on how he will see them all again soon.

His funeral is well-attended, with many remembering his warmth, humour and immense capacity to forgive. Few people are loved both widely and deeply, but he is - and always will be. As one of his grandchildren put it in a final letter, read out to him several months before his death, 'everyone experiences loss, but not everyone has something worth losing.'

It is not long before his wife follows him, dying on 6th March 2018.

Their life story shows a far-from-perfect union. Yet while in many ways Sam and Agnes's refusal to bend from Catholic teachings on marriage make the couple appear hopelessly dysfunctional, Agnes's refusal to live without her husband speaks of a deeper, perhaps more abiding bond between them. A curious mixture of love, frustration, betrayal, duty and friendship lurk somewhere, even in death.

The joint grave containing their remains has a tombstone

bearing the words 'Married for over 60 years'. As the great anthem of Liverpool Football Club promises, 'You'll Never Walk Alone'.

They never did. They never will.



Sam and Vin at Sam's 90th birthday party, 2014.



Julie with Adam and his great-grandfather in Marlow, 2015.



90 years old! Herefordshire, 2014.



Gravestone in Holy Trinity Churchyard, Marlow.



If there's another world, he lives in bliss; if there is none, he made the best of this.

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