



Growing Up in Star Yard

by Doreen Gibson (nee Berry, Stan's Sister-in-Law)

I was born in 1942 at number 12 Star Yard, adjoining West End Stores, Newgate, where my Mam and Dad, Mary and Bill Berry were employed by the then owner, Mr Fieldhouse, who lived on Tanshelf Drive. I remember thinking that he lived in a very posh house as it had a long front garden and looked much grander than any house in Star Yard. I don't know exactly when, but some time later after the war, Mam and Dad purchased the shop from Mr Fieldhouse. Dad was in the RAF during the war so Mam and Mr Fieldhouse ran the shop.

Being born in 1942, I spent my days sat in the pram inside the shop watching the world go by. Mam said I was a good baby, which I guess was very fortunate at the time. There were six children in our family, starting from the eldest, there were: Jack, Dorothy, David, Beryl, myself and last but not least Sylvia. We have always been a close family even though we've had our ups and downs and even though I now live in Australia I still feel as close to them as ever.

The shop is no longer in existence as it was demolished to make way for Jubilee Way, however, they were re-located further up Newgate and then operated as 'Berry's Butties' which was very well known and hugely popular amongst office and factory workers alike in the town. It is not run by the Berry family now but it is still operating under the same name. Reading the Digest recently, which my brother David has been regularly sending to me has brought back many memories of the many happy hours, spent playing out in Star yard.



**Mam & Dad with
Sylvia on the left and me on the right**

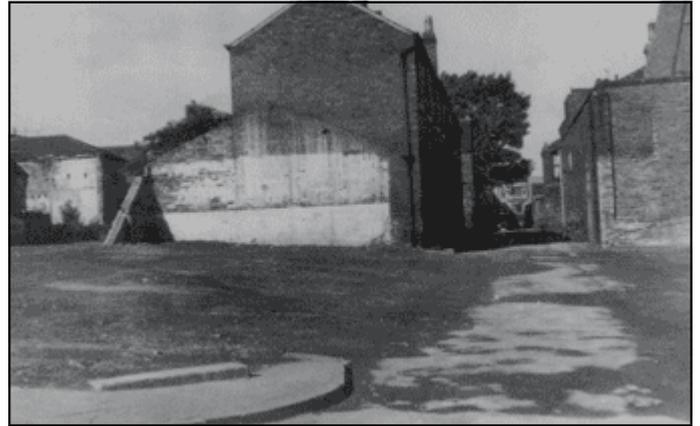
It is a pity that children don't play out as they used to when all the children in the street were involved and you knew everyone. When I was about three-and-a-half-years old, I was playing in the backyard with a football and apparently I tried to stand on the ball and broke my leg. It was a particularly bad time for that to happen as my sister Beryl was in hospital with a burst appendix, Sylvia was still a baby, Dad was in the RAF and Mam was working in the shop. Mrs Shields who lived down our yard trundled me off to Pontefract Hospital in the pram, I can't help but think that this was a perfect example of helpful neighbours, but that's just how it was back then, everyone helped everyone.



West End Stores

We used to put on our own concerts all the time, I particularly remember singing to "I'll be your sweetheart". When our parents weren't looking, we also used to climb onto the Crescent roof which was flat at the back. We got up there via a smaller wall which was part of the Methodist Church which also backed onto the yard. I used to find it a bit scary but it was a great feeling of achievement when I managed it. On nice sunny days we would often go to the Park or go tad-poling with our jam jars. I can't actually remember where we went to get tadpoles but I know we set off up Mill Hill and that we always hurried passed Dark Lane in case something dreadful happened to us!

Amongst our favourite games were Sticks, Rounder's, Skipping, either individual ropes or a very large one which we would jump into, several of us at a time. We would also use the large rope to jump over, starting very low and raising the level after everyone had jumped to see who could jump the highest; Whip and Top, colouring the tops with chinks to make the best pattern when the top was spinning; Hide and Seek, Conkers, which were collected from the Park, and ball games against the Crescent Cinema wall which backed onto Star Yard. This was an excellent flat surface with no windows to break! There were two exits from the Crescent into our yard which were enclosed steps, one larger than the other, and that's the one we played in when it was raining.



**Making space for Jubilee Way
(only the shop step remains)**

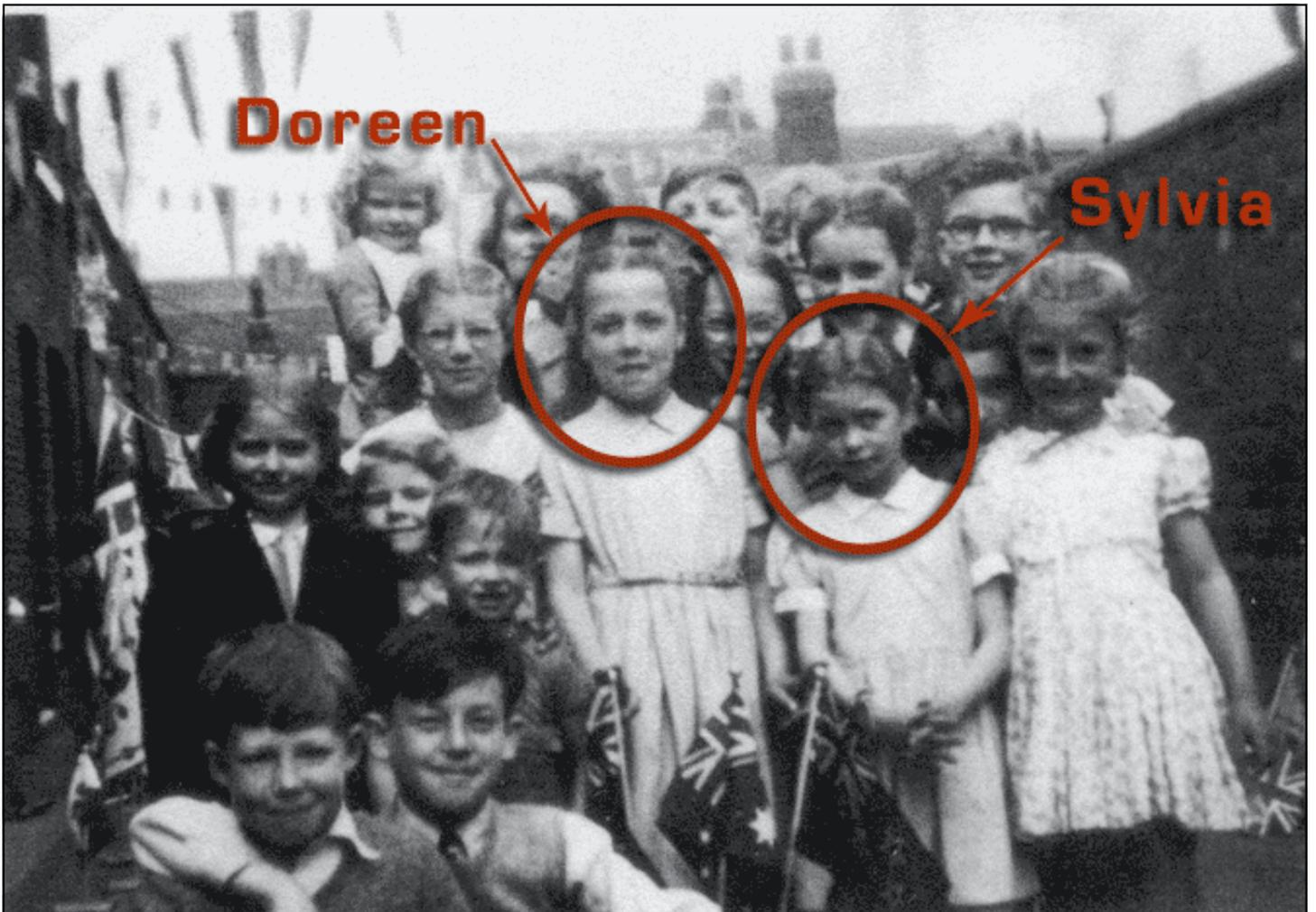
After a long hard day playing out we'd go in for tea and then a bath in front of the fire where it was warm, rather than go upstairs to the bathroom. My best friend, Pat Spur, who lived next door, would often join us for tea and a bath too. She was an only child so I think she enjoyed our busy home.

Mam used to do the washing with a posser and a wringer, and we also had a boiler in the outhouse where she would do the whites. We were lucky as we had our own enclosed back yard where we would hang the washing, zig-zagging the line across the yard to hang as much as possible. Many people down the Star yard didn't have this option and they had to hang their washing across the yard, which proved quite a pain if the coal lorry came with its deliveries.

I can remember many different people coming to the shop, but in particular I remember the Gypsies calling at the shop or to the house and Mam would always buy something, usually pegs; I think she wanted to make sure they didn't put a curse on us! Then there was the Rag and Bone man who would come down the yard and the coal lorry tipping a load of coal by our grate. When we were older, we would all help with getting it all down into our cellar. Another thing I vividly remember was how important it was to always keep your windows clean, also the front door step, which had to be scrubbed and then finished off with the scouring stone. This was done religiously as otherwise the neighbours might just think that you didn't keep a clean house.

I went to Love Lane School and walked home for lunch. I tried school dinners once and that was enough. I would rather make the walk home and back. After Love Lane I went to Northgate Secondary School and I remember Miss Chamberlain, the headmistress. I also remember Miss Clayton who used to have her class over the road from the main building. Her lesson was domestic science and she would teach us how to wash different items and also how to iron. I particularly remember ironing handkerchiefs which had to be perfectly square and if there was any embroidery on them it must only be ironed on the back. I often think of those lessons when I'm ironing to this day.

We had sewing lessons and learned how to make a French seam, smocking, buttonholes etc., I think the first thing was to make a cover for a bible we were each given by the Educational Department. We embroidered a pattern on the cover as well as our name. I still have that bible and the cover. My friends at Northgate were Pam Fitton, Ann Pickersgill and Kathryn Atkinson.



Coronation Day Street Party

Rear: Janice Spurr, Edna Spurr, Barry Walters, unknown

Next Row: Wendy Lill, Doreen Berry, unknown, Pauline Robinson, Eric Redfern

Two groups of three: (left) Pam Westerman, Susan Wagstaf, Dick Westerman, (right) Sylvia Berry, Pat Spurr, Jacqueline Dixon

Foreground: Terry Walker, Colin Blackburn

The school often went to St. Giles Church; I suppose it would have been for Easter, Harvest Festival etc., We went to the Castle for tennis, which I thought was a real treat, but I can't remember going very often – it was probably raining!

I used to look forward to home-time on a Thursday in particular as Thursday was half day closing in the shop and I knew Mam had probably been busy baking or making bread cakes. Her bread cakes were delicious with Lurpac butter on them, spread very liberally of course. Other favourites were her tarts and scones and, as you can image, they didn't last long. When I think of all the work Mam would have had to do I often wonder why she didn't take it a bit easy on a Thursday afternoon but that wasn't her way – she was a wonderful Mum, always there for us all.

All the family at some time or another would help in the shop and sometimes I would deliver small grocery orders in a box to nearby customers. We also used to stack the shelves and keep them tidy and when we were older we actually served customers.

A lot of items were delivered to us in bulk, such as a tub of butter, a box of lard, lentils, sugar, dried currants and sultanas. There were also whole sides of bacon which Dad would bone and roll ready for slicing. I've yet to taste bacon or ham as good as it was then. We also used to get biscuits in tins and if we asked Mam for a biscuit she would always say "Only pick the broken ones". The whole ones had to be kept for the customers of course. During the summer we stored the butter and lard in the shop cellar so it didn't get too soft.

When I finished my time at Northgate, I did a year's secretarial course at Whitwood Technical College before working at Kays in Leeds. One night when I couldn't get home because the buses had stopped running due to the severe fog. My Mam asked my brother-in-law, Stan, if he could get me home. Unfortunately, his car wasn't registered but, ever the resourceful type, Stan got a label from a Guinness bottle and put that in the window; it looked the part! and he

got me safely home. After leaving Kays I got a job at Hepworth Tailors and if ever the buses stopped running I would get the train from Leeds which would take me to Monkhill Station. I certainly remember that it was a long walk home in the fog from the station to Star yard with a scarf wrapped around my mouth.

I suppose I would have been about 15 when I started going dancing and I loved it. We used to go to the church hall at the bottom of Baghill where it was mostly 'gay gordons' and the 'progressive' barn dance. The progressive was a good dance as you got to check out all the boys but it was disappointing when it was a girl taking the boys part, as was often the case.

I went to the Crescent Ballroom mainly during the week when we would learn the dances and on Saturday night when it was the real thing. At that time ballroom dancing was on television and I could just imagine myself in one of those wonderful sequined dresses floating around the floor. My older brothers and sisters used to go to the Embassy, but Mam wouldn't let me go there; I think she thought the standard had dropped and I was too young. One night I went to the Crescent Dance in a new dress I got from Kays club, I thought I looked like the bees knees but when I arrived I discovered two other girls in exactly the same dress, I quickly ducked home and changed. A few boys who came to the dance were forever popping out for a beer and would come back in sucking on a mint. I don't know who they thought they were kidding. They were always there for the last few dances thought – funny that!

Being a big family, clothes used to be passed down if they were suitable and I remember a particular dress my sister Beryl had which I couldn't wait to get so that I could go to the dance in it. It had a crossover bodice and a white underskirt with a floaty material over the top which had a faint check in it. I eventually got it!

Pam Fitton and I used to go to the dance together and afterwards she would often stay at our house or we would walk home to her place in Ladybalk. We used to practice dancing in their lounge room to 'Who's sorry now' by Connie Francis, those were the days uh!



The Berry Siblings

Left to Right: Sylvia, David, (ME) Doreen, Beryl, Jack and Dot (Stan's wife)

I emigrated to Australia with my husband David Gibson and children, Simon and Jenny in 1970, and we are very happy here, especially now that we have four lovely grandchildren, but it's never easy to leave family behind, we have been back as many times as is possible and Yorkshire is still very special to me, so it's been great to take the opportunity to take a trip 'back home'.

.... Doreen Gibson - (Stan's sister-in-law)