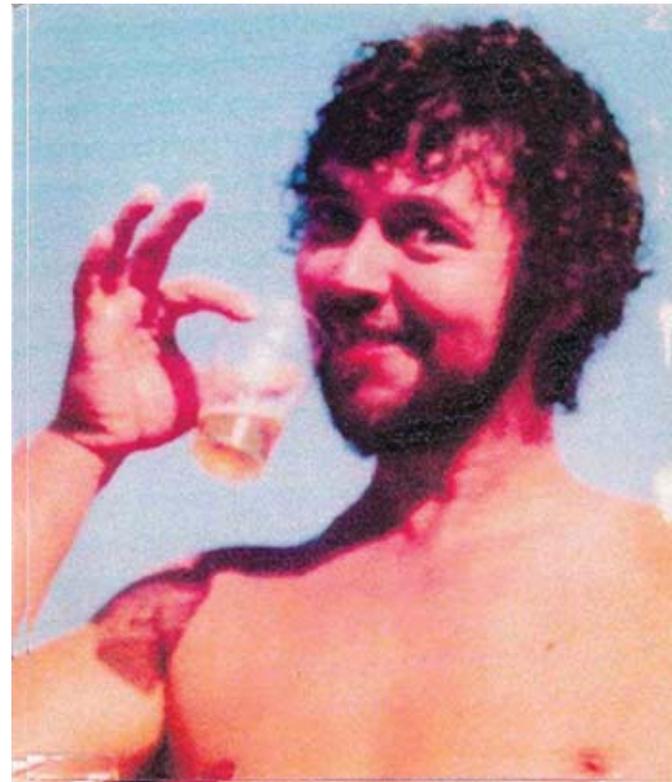


Memories of JOHN DENNIS

A REMARKABLE MINER FROM
KIVETON PARK COLLIERY, SOUTH YORKSHIRE,
WHO KICKED THE BUCKET ON THE 22ND OF
MAY, 2000.



and Jenny Tells Her Tale

"I go ape everytime I see you smile, I'm a sing-song gorilla with a carry on crazy style, I'm going to bop you on the head and love you all the while, aba raba ring ting tong , I'm related to ol' King Kong, Baby when you say your mine, with that honky tonk monkeyshine, When you hold my hand I'm a prehistoric man, I GO APE".

- A typical John Dennis inventive diversion of a popular song -

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SPEECHES AT A FUNERAL PYRE: ROTHERHAM, SOUTH YORKSHIRE JUNE 6th 2002

This gathering represents John's life and says a great deal about our respect for him as a person. In fact all his life is represented whether close family who watched him grow, school pals and teenage cohorts, myself and his children, his work mates and their partners, friends from the folk club and those he made during the strike and the friends of our children. Each one of us brings our own special memories of John here today and in that sense JD (John Dennis) is here with us now to celebrate his life. When discussing arrangements for today, I commented upon the unusual nature

of some of this service and qualified it by saying JD was not a run-of-the-mill sort of person.

He took pleasure where he found it.

In nature: - the flight or song of a bird, the perfection of a flower, the colour of an insect's wings. - A walk across the fields with John was a voyage of discovery.

In music: - whether playing rock 'n' roll on a pub piano, enjoying the harmony of traditional folk tunes, blues on the guitar, or being brought to tears the first time he heard the Bruch Violin concerto.

In children: - in poetry and literature. In having a good meal with friends around his table AND in a good malt whiskey

John lived his life to the full and has often been heard to say he had no regrets and would do the same all over again. I believe John took more from life than most of us. Nevertheless, he was a giver who rarely spoke ill of anyone and similarly, rarely grumbled or moaned when things were difficult for him.

He wouldn't "talk posh", treated people as equals and had a mischievous sense of humour as we all know. None more so than his workmates. Small wonder then, that when we met under that table in The Saxon pub in 1966 and he walked me home and proposed - I accepted. We married and for most of my life JD was my best friend.

We did things together and took enormous pleasure in entertaining. WE WERE A TEAM - "THE A TEAM" - as JD described it. My happiest memories, as I'm sure are many of yours, are of JD with a glass in his hand talking for hours on a wealth of topics. Invariably music would come to be a part of these gatherings which is why his music was chosen for today.

John was a happy-go-lucky sort of person. Maggie summed him up when she said despite his many problems he hadn't changed in his attitude to people he met on the street even the week before he died.

John liked to drink and refused to compromise even when faced with tremendous health problems he knew couldn't tolerate alcohol.

Although we came to live apart we could never abandon each other. Sarah, Matt and I simply couldn't bear to witness on a daily basis his chosen path of self-destruction.

You should know that his interest and passion for what was happening in the world hadn't waned. Beside his settee was a page of his thoughts on the Middle East crises.

Jenny Dennis: Autumn 2004

JD died peacefully and with great dignity. He knew he was dying and welcomed it, saying he was tired and ready. He asked that I be strong and remember he had chosen his path and was going on his own terms. I'm trying; in fact, we have had to try so hard to accept this for the last ten years. Trouble is we loved you so much John and always did.

Love:
Jenny Dennis



HOMAGE TO JOHN

There are only a few people in my life I have had a great respect for but one of them is John Dennis. He remained basically the same to the end despite the ravages of alcohol never bending to the passing fads and cop-outs of the times. It's an old truism but the miners were well to the forefront of the working classes in these islands in taking on a brutal and barbaric system. John Dennis was one of the very best of this gallant band.

In many respects, John with his exuberant sense of life, deep intelligence, wide

Addendum. Extracts from some notes I kept during 1984

Plight of Single Men: Latest concern. One lad has completely disappeared from village. Some because of harassment at home and stress are living in picket huts and a union local (Nalgo) are so concerned they are investigating the possibility of a central care station for growing number, which the community financially cannot support. Mark, aged 19 admitted to hospital – anorexic – last week. Guilt – eating food when he was breadwinner for widowed mum and schoolgirl sister.

22nd August 1984: Scabs reported for work. Two live in village. Village invaded by police.

Women able to picket own pit in larger numbers at 4 am and 12 pm. Community exposed directly to police provocation of violence and harassment. Complaints pour in plus my complaint re: urinating in public. Abuse at women, £20 note! Whores!... Reaction on witnessing brutality may mean arrest certainly detention at local station for up to six hours. 69 year old woman shouted: "Why do that he didn't do anything. Bullies". Then taken three quarters of a mile away and left to find own way back home in her slippers. She was found in tears! Four weeks ago, three 17-year-old girls were arrested after passing scabs on their way home. The girls were taken to Maltby – six miles away – and kept for three and a half hours where they became a freeshow mistreated and referred to as whores and lesbians. Charged with breach of the peace! Case brought to court a week later followed by further charge of threatening behaviour. Common practice to introduce extra charges if police fear original charge may not stick.... There have been 80 arrests in the village involving 7 prison sentences of up to three weeks. Bail conditions imposed vary – not to picket own colliery or only picket own colliery or do not enter certain areas i.e. Nottinghamshire, or curfew by 9pm.

Women: First women in dispute. Part time workers now bread winners. In a traditionally male dominated area men acknowledge women's role and openly admit without our support in presenting solid front may not have been able to continue. Witnessing changing attitudes and political awareness of women. We can never return to status quo. Women now motivated and will continue to react against injustice and protect communities. Thrown away pinnies, overcome traditional male dominance.

escape easily from. Clean coal, though expensive, has become a reality since 1984-5. JD was never conned into thinking we'd seen the end of coal. In the years after he'd been invalidated and following the wholesale pit closure programme of the early 1990s, he especially noted the huge coal barges navigating the Trent and the Aire/Calder navigation, containing coal direct from the Rotterdam spot market. He often said a new generation of coal miners would have to be trained and he wouldn't be there to enlighten them! Oil and gas will eventually be depleted and renewables can only have a limited effect in meeting the exponential rise in capitalism's energy needs. Meanwhile, according to 'the experts', there are at least 140 years of accessible coal in this country. However we were responsible for inflicting the biggest trauma ever inflicted by this country's industrial working. We are the real unforgiven and our Pandora's box must never again be re-opened.

Nuclear energy is far preferable and the state will pursue this option with an unrelenting, crazed determination rather than think the unthinkable, which means countenancing the return of the miners. But will the public take this lying down? Pandemonium could ensue and in which case the state may be forced to confront its trauma over the mining of coal. Many ex-miners and the few miners that are left here are increasingly aware that this is the case and everywhere are beginning to vociferously say so. Why else have new vast coal wharves (at the cost of half a billion pounds) been proposed for the mouth of the Humber to ship in coal from all over the world? The oft repeated catch phrase "coals to Newcastle" is a by-word for economic absurdity all over the English speaking world and still is as relevant as ever. World shipping is almost totally dependent on oil which, once oil prices really start to rise, will add greatly to the cost of imported coal. Even the simplest cost benefit analyses will tell you that.

John in his last few years kept a notebook often full of reflections. In it he briefly sketched out his views on The Ridley Plan drawn up by the Thatcher Government after their ignominious retreat over pit closures in 1982. There was an immediate wave of wild cat strikes and, coming so soon after the great urban rebellions of inner city youth in 1981, it was thought prudent to temporarily give in. John called the Plan: "The bluest blueprint this side of the drawing for The Titanic" put into place, "so that Capital and the global market would not be seriously threatened again in the UK". Our defeat also became the blueprint for New Labour whose descent in to horror knows no end. With barely even a whisper of protest from within the party, it has increasingly aligned itself with America's neocons who are hell bent on bringing about a biblical endgame apocalypse.

Was our end the end for everyone else? Cortonwood was called the Alamo – thus far and no further. But it was also the Titanic and, if you recall, nobody who defended the original Texan Alamo, survived. Did our defeat herald a world where the boot (as Orwell said) would be forever pushed into the human face, albeit a redesigned boot with a Nike or Adidas logo? The miners are dead. Long live the miners!

knowledge and his delightfully mad humour were also part of the very essence of the miners especially during the great strike of 1984/5. Like John, that strike with its quest for humanity and community looked towards the creation of a new world and a world without money. All of us too who weren't miners looked to it for the fulfillment of our future hopes and happiness. If the miners were defeated we'd be defeated too.

It was a strike of earth-shattering dimensions eagerly sensed by workers and others throughout the world from Europe, Asia, to South Africa, to the Americas. It's fair to say that if the great strike had succeeded – and it nearly did – the world would have palpably become, almost immediately, a better place to live in as workers everywhere over the globe would have seized on the example set by the miners here. This country would have been turned upside down and that nightmare of PM Thatcher's free market economics would never have gotten off the ground. Truly we would have been at the forefront of an inspiring social revolution, imaginative, joyful – all encompassing in its beautiful diversity – and the like of which the world has never seen.

Instead and as we all know, the opposite happened. Defeat and hell unfolded everywhere. That real Nightmare on Elm Street unleashed by that grim reaper, "Scissorhands" Thatcher, became reality, as day by day it endlessly got worse as everything collapsed before an onslaught. Blair, need it be said, is merely perfecting its brutality making it even worse than the former Tories. It's a poisoned atmosphere we cannot even for a brief moment distance ourselves from.

For those who fought that great battle they reaped the whirlwind in the devastation of their lives and communities as devastation also swept through the cities and the green fields. Everywhere and wholesale, peoples' lives were wrecked. It meant that the great vision and passionate quest for a new world got turned into its opposite as state-orchestrated destruction drifted into self-destruction as bleak nothingness often set in for the protagonists – abandoned and alone.

John was one, if you like, who had this Hobson's Choice thrust upon him. Always one who liked a good drink – often teetering on very heavy drinking – John, to make his mates feel at home would, for instance, carry his tape machine up through the vegetable garden late on a cold January night as he played some Mississippi blues accompanied by excellent home brewed beer. Bit by bit though, John really did take to the bottle as other serious illnesses related to hard graft began to overwhelm him. Illness and drink did not go well together but for John cutting out drink was never an option. Lacking in all future hope as everything disintegrated and vanished in front of his eyes, John resolved, as his son Matt said, "to commit slow-motion suicide" as his life spiralled out of control with everything falling apart. A real craziness ensued which was impossible to live or be with for any length of time. It was however, such an utterly understandable course to take and many other fine people have taken the same path.

Nonetheless, even during his on-going, final collapse, things could still be occasionally enjoyable. I remember a few years ago picking up a guitar I'd stopped playing decades before and with John on another guitar played some old blues together. It felt exhilarating. John's crazy letters were always a treat but he also wrote some fine things, particularly a true life story about a boat he was forced to build for one of the pit bosses. It ended up being accidentally-on-purpose demolished. It was like a piece of social surrealism with all the wry asides, mad-cap edge and precision which was John's hallmark. It's been published in other countries and in other languages, though typically retarded England saw fit not to publish simply because it was just too good.

Towards the end John's love of wildlife again strongly resurfaced. He once explained how sparrow hawks could dive through a thick hedge without slowing down. It was something I'd never noticed. Typically John resigned from the RSPB (the bird preservation society) complaining to the editorial board that the magazine had become purely ad oriented, obsessed with sponsorship at the expense of field naturalist research. More broadly John felt that the organisation had gone money mad purchasing tracts of land as they sought to buy their way out of an all enveloping ecological crisis. In short, the RSPB was opting for a free-market solution. He was right. The last time I had a good long talk with him was autumn last year and the old lucid, warm John was there again in person', though glad to see the whisky I'd brought with me.

It's difficult saying all these things and if John was here, he'd probably have a drink discreetly in his hand or hidden in some bushes around the corner, nodding with the things he agreed with and with others, putting forward another point of view. Maybe he is even having a drink now right there. Whatever, this would merely be a preamble on the way to the pub. So let's take a final cue from John. Cheers mate. I'll never forget you.

With lots of love, Dave

Extended footnote: added later.

Two criticisms were made of the above speech. I had not intended to read it out verbatim but to simply use it as a prompt. But as time was of the essence I did read it out. I've never done anything like this before and I dislike ritualistic speechifying intensely as yet another example of anti-dialogue and non-communication. I was also very nervous of stating what I believed to be the truth while not shying away from John's alcoholism - especially as I too like more than a good drink - before an assembly full of Yorkshire miners, their wives and kids. I have the greatest regard for them as people because they also formed part of my background and left an indelible impression on me. I also partially owe to them a certain dogged intransigence and cussedness.

We couldn't go back but neither could we go forward. We lost a mighty strike only to become lost to ourselves. Losing any inner coherence we began to make crazy mistakes, highly personal mistakes with enormous personal consequences. Only yesterday we were the pole of attraction throughout the world and now we were nothing. Yesterday everybody wanted to meet us. Now nobody did and, in a way, we were used and spat out by the media as some sad story in yesterday's news. We were floundering all over the place, prey to so many outside forces that weren't our own. We were forced to submit to the increasing reign of money terrorism, when money was the last thing we'd got. Losing our famed practical communitarian common sense meant we became exposed to the state's cold as charity's array of social services right down to it's new army of up-to-the-minute therapists telling us how to 'live' and "move on" - as the idiotic mantra goes. When you are heartbroken the last thing you can do is move on! These snooty individuals merely tried to impose middle class forms of psychologising on us, completely clueless about our own more enlightened, humane ways of formerly doing things. Most of the time all they did was inflict even more damage on us. For these berks all we held dear belonged to 'the past'! After such defeat it takes a long, long time to get your life back on some kind of even keel, and many is the one who has been unable to do so.

As for me, like many others who'd been through the strike I tried university and studied sociology at Sheffield and then took a teaching degree at Huddersfield University. True we could do it and a reasonably large proportion of unemployed, desperate people got degrees though most didn't use it to then take up a career. Later I was to sadly compare my university experiences with my earlier evening classes when I learned how to make things like corn dollies. The latter was something I could put to practical use with other people, while university tended to be so much ideological hogwash having nothing to say about my living situation. Despite this offer of a 'new life' our real lives fell apart, our marriages, relationships and families broke up as all connecting links that kept our community vibrant were smashed to smithereens. Every living thing that couldn't be turned into a commodity was stolen from us - most of all our ways of behaviour and what was in our hearts - a microcosm if you like for what capitalism was already doing to nearly everybody else. Our strength had been that we had resisted these unwanted developments for so long.

In these reminisces I've tried to give some idea how the memory of the miners' strike remains very much alive in our neck of the woods. Today we are faced with the rundown of major energy resources especially oil and gas. This is irreversible. The "dash for gas" refrain was first heard during the miners strike and though the term has pretty much dropped out of use, the reality is the UK is becoming overwhelmingly more reliant on gas. The momentum has been opportunistically maintained by each successive government solely in order to smother the social vision and example of the coal miners. It was necessary to destroy a rebellious working class here and we were at its core. In so doing power (in more ways than one) has created a dilemma for itself it cannot

In particular here I must mention certain individuals who were exceptionally helpful as well as being tremendously clued-in theoretically in cutting through the crap. The autonomous French grouping, Os Cangaceiros was one such, as were radical individuals like Nick Brandt. The latter was particularly generous with his money as well as participating in creative episodes. For instance, seeing Xmas was coming up and with the strikers children in mind, he told me how he had asked smart London shops for donations to the miners' strike and those that didn't cough up he and his mates would rip-off blind. Mind you, even those shops that agreed also were shoplifted, but it didn't really matter as they had more than enough in this society of raging inequality. Thus all kinds of goodies were delivered to us. I remember Nick brought up smoked salmon which miners responded to by jokingly declaring: "What's this - uncooked fish caught off Bridlington pier" as they gobbled it up like there was no tomorrow!

Bit by bit throughout the strike you gradually became aware how a lot of the strike's supporters saw the struggle – if not as their own – but as if their lives somehow depended on its outcome. In a sense as the strike went on and on, you realised our struggle was a struggle for the whole of society although not realising this sharply until much later – even years after the event. You were also aware of how some young people from the upper echelons of society were hungry for your reality experiences and latched on to you as a form of surrogate life – sometimes giving you survival money as payment for feeding off your life. For a while this type of thing was OK but as the darkening years unfolded after the bitter defeat marking the end of the miners near civil war, it often felt like a leeching on your body, like you were being sucked dry by some vampire as increasingly some of them more and more criticised you for your inadequacies – even looking for all your Achilles heels – possibly because you hadn't saved them from their upper middle class fate which they had professed to loathe so much. It finally really pissed you off.... it was like you were merely actors in some real life soap opera – a situation they peered into only to tick you off – then to withdraw back into their own rarefied, privileged world – until the time came to tick you off all over again when they needed some extra oomph in their empty lives!

The emphasis here must be on the darkening years and the responses of different individuals. If we'd won everybody would have reacted in far more amenable, communitarian and understanding ways. That is apart from the real powers that be, who would have been in a state of complete panic and which all of us, bar none, would have relished.

Remember as a final resume of what I've written here, the defeat of the strike cracked nearly everybody apart who was engaged in trying to bring about its triumph. Cracking up so often brings out all our ugliest aspects and nobody wishes to come near for fear of being infected. The might of the system destroyed our ways of behaving and functioning in everyday life right down to the simplest of levels. We literally didn't know where to turn for succour. It was as though we lost all our past referentials.

It is a heritage I don't want to escape from and when my Mother lay dying in her last words as death approached, she described the feeling of claustrophobia she experienced descending into the drift mine in North Yorks where my grandfather and uncles worked, to escape zeppelin raids in the First World War. Although I'd kept the tears within me up to that point her final sentences alluding to the Yorkshire miners opened the floodgates within me.

As I stood there this memory came back to me and I was overcome by a thought of my own wasted life even though I have desperately fought against that waste. Above all, I did not want to break down in front of Jenny, Matthew and Sarah Dennis not wanting, if only in my own eyes, to let them down. All I wanted to do was run, run, run. Perhaps in retrospect the text should have been re-worked and certain errors corrected. My heart was in my mouth when I finished and I was surprised as anyone at the spontaneous applause. I was particularly gratified when, later on, young people came up to me to say how utterly fed up they were with their lives. Here at last between young and old a real dialogue was beginning to take shape and the "Homage" had helped prepare the ground. For a brief few hours the reification of youth and age, that pigeon-holing according to commodity stereotypes began to crack and we could all begin to admit just how bad we all felt. After a few pints much older ex-miners came up to shake hands and some of their wives put their arms around me. On the wasteland new shoots had begun to sprout'..

One of the criticisms in the cold light of day pointed out that an uprising on the backs of a miners' victory should have had a cautionary "could well have" inserted otherwise the argument was deterministic. That is quite true and should be altered. The second criticism was levelled at my suggestion that the miners' strike was ushering in a world without money. When putting together the "Homage" I was well aware of all the difficulties surrounding such a suggestion knowing full well it could cause controversy but because of the time allotted to me during the funeral service I had to glibly pass over the difficulties.

However they can now be raised in this footnote. A mantra-like insistence on the abolition of money can become tiresome because it neglects how we are going to get from a world in which money increasingly becomes the only necessity to the money-less utopia. Abolition of the wages system in the early years of the 20th century was high up on the statutes of the Irish Transport and General Union as it was also inscribed, until recently, on the banner of the National Union of Railwaymen (now RMT) here. In practise it was, most of the time, a mere slogan like the internationalism of the Second and Third Internationals. On the other hand, strikes over pay are not necessarily at odds with the final aim of abolishing the wages system. It must be emphasized, if further emphasis is necessary, that the miners strike was not about pay. They feared above all that the destruction of their livelihoods would lead to a destruction of a community that was remarkable in its own right. Moreover, henceforth

meaningful resistance, sufficient to strike terror into the heart of the world's ruling class, would be all but destroyed. Nearly 20 years on we are beginning to see how right these fears were as paranoia and the terror of isolation everywhere engulfs the living. Some saw in the strike a merely backward response and a submission preserving old style exploitation and drudgery. In reality, that was only a minor part of this epic saga that promised so much to those who experienced it, even if it was for many supporters only at a distance. Nonetheless the strike constantly threatened to transcend its stated aims.

Increasingly, during the year-long miners' strike of 1984/5, as the months wore on, money almost ceased to exist. Of course, for the miners and their families they would have loved some eccentric rich toff to have turned up throwing sack fulls of '50 notes around but they knew that was also the stuff of wild fiction. Apart from gifts of food and clothes from support groups and massed women's pickets stopping bailiffs evicting miners' families or cutting off gas and electricity etc, forms of barter played quite a major part. Of course, one can be "correct" by arguing that barter is a pre-capitalist, pre-monetary form of value exchange implying equal labour and is therefore "un-communist". However, it has played a part in 20th revolutions and when a capitalist economy ceases to function as in Argentina and in vast swathes of Russia today willy-nilly it makes an appearance. Basically, it's a bread and butter issue and even the most unsullied theorist would be forced to submit to it if they wished to continue breathing. All depending, it can be a makeshift measure leading to restoration or a prelude to something better. Unless it is part of a broader unfolding social process encompassing ever greater sections of the world's populations entailing the abolition of global enterprises, commodities, the state, the army, police and what have you, barter is doomed to remain a largely notional interregnum, often getting increasingly desperate, in the rise and fall of capitalist accumulation.

Perhaps I should end this postscript on another personal note by drawing upon my own experiences. As a child, I can remember my grandfather, a Yorkshire miner, throwing shillings at me (10 pence) and telling me that coins "were made round, to go round". If one wants to be accurate it is possible to argue such a simple-minded view goes no further than a pious desire to "democratise" money. True, it does, but to me it also expressed unease, a wish to have done with it by simply giving it away (which he often did). And when I came of age as an earnest "revolutionary", I would try to picture to my Mother the wonders of a world without money. "Don't be daft," she would say, "however would people survive?" Then years later, after I had learned not to tub-thump and pressurise, she suddenly announced how she, "had often wondered why there was such a thing as money". Having left school at eleven clearly she had been pondering on the roots of things in her own untutored way. Looking back I realise that such "uneducated" insights had as a child, a lasting influence on me. The defeat of the miners meant their wisdom which, to me, became operative in the miners' strike of 1984/85 is now tragically lost. Let us hope not for good.

To this day the police are hated in the former mining areas with a gut hatred as raw as ever in confrontations that hardly ever make the news, except when things really get out of hand. Thus a spate of cop car burnings early in the summer of 2004 in the ex-mining village of Goldthorpe a little to the north of us got on local news and was attributed to the strike.

You can't write about the police occupation of the villages without mentioning the scabs. They danced a vicious tango together. Inevitably, the world over, scabs are hated by their workmates. This feeling has always been particularly intense among the UK miners and the Dirty Blackleg Miner – a song originating in a Northumberland miners' strike during the late 19th century – is perhaps the most savage industrial folksong ever as it is an open incitement to kill scabs. Scabbing during the epic 1984/5 miners' strike was of a different order altogether, if that's possible. The scabs weren't, as in the past, just in the pay of management. They actually brought about the end of our communities, the coal industry and the end of ours (and ironically their) way of life. Myopia is too mild a term for their evil crimes. No wonder then most scabs have been forced to remain as they were – vicious, heartless, vindictive creatures and as psychotically insane as the police were during the strike. Many are armed and keep their hunting guns handy just in case someone takes justice into their own hands. Hatred for the scabs twenty years on hasn't diminished. A couple of months ago, an ex-miner celebrated his sixtieth birthday and invited a lot of his former workmates to what he hoped would be a good do in the pub. He'd been a scab albeit one that went in late in the day. Nonetheless, many of his old workmates never turned up to his celebration. He went home and hanged himself.

More recently, a few months ago in fact, there was a bitter argument between a scab and a striker – Keith "Froggy" Frogson – from Annesley Woodhouse in North Nottinghamshire. It got violent and the striker was killed. Before finally being arrested, the scab hid out for weeks in Sherwood Forest and the police search for him was featured on the national news several days running. The striker's funeral turned into a huge event with hundreds of people turning out from all over to honour him. As for myself, I still bristle up whenever I pass a scab in the street. Earlier in the year I attended a meeting protesting the proposed phasing out of care attendants for old people, a typical cost cutting exercise Rotherham council regularly tries out in the hope we get tired of responding. A scab from 1984 got up to say his bit more or less justifying the council's proposals. If anything, he was even more stupid, cocksure and arrogant than ever. In a way this is hardly surprising. Though this apology for a human being was axiomatic in destroying our community, it is their world all right, as the essence of a scab – knifing comrades, neighbours and workmates in the back – is the very essence of our free market society.

Friends and a resume

ing the picket, even though there were plenty of women present, the coppers would regularly get their willies out and piss towards us. This was usually the tactics deployed by the London Met and it created friction between different county constabularies, especially those from Devon and Cornwall, who were horrified at such behaviour. Indeed the inspector from Devon and Cornwall actually brought two pairs of his own shoes to give to the pickets at the pit gates.

However it was precisely their vicious and brutal behaviour that was really effective and helped militarily win the strike for the police. Some of the cops would literally stoop to anything. Relaxing in their deluxe coaches, we'd regularly note how some of them would be watching hardcore porno films, out of their heads on all kinds of drugs. Videos were then just beginning to take off and hard core porn videos were practically unknown of then. It was, if you like, a precursor of what society everywhere, with the defeat of the social movement, was to become - a brutalised nothingness decked out with sexually charged imagery, with no scope for tenderness, love or caring. However, you must understand the coppers, after days and weeks on the picket lines and almost universally hated and stared at by every passer by with hate filled eyes, were now more than incensed, they'd gone insane. Allegedly pursuing pickets, they actually rode a horse into our small paper shop, even though the shop was too small to turn a horse around in. They then had a devil of a job getting out but the police were now too illogical to see that in the first place.

When we'd visit our lads banged up in local prisons a similiar behaviour was apparent. I'll never forget going to see poor old Albert who'd finally been nicked and carted off to Lincoln jail. Being Xmas, a local market trader had donated a sackful of mixed nuts to be shared on the picket line. The police found them in the boot of Albert's car and claimed they were to be used as weapons against the horses. Albert was charged and given three months in prison. I'd cooked a whole load of food, pies and other things. The prison officers took off the lid from my food box and green-gossed all over my cooking, gleefully delighting in their vicious spite. Like the police they'd also become sick in the head. I was devastated and as soon as I was out of their sight I cried my eyes out. What a thing to do to a man. Shortly after the defeat of the miners, Albert died, his grief compounded by a tragic accident. His home had accidentally caught fire and one of his beloved daughters was burnt to death....

But, even now, the coppers could employ more subtle tactics, which were just as loathsome. A few had been instructed to get hold of little children and, in return for a few details about their parents, promise to buy them sweets, ice creams and lollipops. Many of the kids, in their innocence, would fall for this ploy. My son Matt, a 7-year-old kid, along with his mate was asked about our movements. He got his ice cream and sweets all right, then promptly ran off home telling the coppers to sod off. I'm proud of him for that.

Of all my memories of the miners' strike there is one in particular that sticks out. In the early summer of 1984 there was a virtual uprising at Fitzwilliam (around the Kinsley drift mine) in West Yorks. For a time, striking miners and disaffected town youth came together to fight the police invasion of this little town. Unlike today's largely brain dead apologies for the rather more subversive hooligans of the early 80s, this emancipatory coming together had been anticipated since the class riots of 1981. It was the longed for coming together of strikers and kids hanging around on street corners. For quite a time after the miners' strike was over the effects seemed to linger on. Walking into the countryside from Fitzwilliam one noted a singular absence of fences, hedgerows and trees. All had been cut down for firewood. In consequence, the landscape took on a new aspect as if fields had been abolished and there was a return to common land such as had existed before the enclosures. In immediate terms, it meant no land owner dared tell you to fuck off his land as you walked across former fields to the smart, very up-market hamlet of Nostell, next to the heritage pile of Nostell Priory. And yet in this olde world hamlet not a soul stirred. "For Sale" notices were everywhere. The rich had fled - perhaps fearing they would be "murdered in their beds" by insurgent miners bent on bloody revenge in this unintentional, though delightful piss-take of Olivier Goldsmith's. The Deserted Village now based on the paranoid fears of the upper middle classes and their daily fodder of Yorkshire Post editorials. But to me, all this was concrete evidence of the wider ramifications of the miners' strike. A shadowy hint - if you like - of totality. And if I remember correctly, I overheard a conversation on a bus near to this spot by local lads discussing in their broad Yorkshire accents the abolition of money. In their hands was the indispensable can of beer. Cheers again, John Dennis!

- Dave -

The following are two e-mails from France read out by a tearful Fraser - one of John's young friends whom he'd some time smilingly describe as "Lead-belly Arkwright".

Dear John,

Despite the distance, despite the absence, John, you've always kept a place in our hearts. We've known you after the strike and because of the strike. Your intelligence, your sense of humour, your open mind, your fights, your humanity have moved us, impressed us and made you dear to us. Broken by the strike, broken by life, ill, alcoholic, John: damned poet, friend, we won't forget you.

YOUR FRIENDS FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

- Chantal, Remy, Sylvie, Agathe and Victor.

Dear John,

Now you've gone and I think of you with all my heart. Since we met during the strike, you made me share with you your sense of friendship, your love of Yorkshire and the moors, which I too loved so much. You fought with all your might during the strike for another world and man's dignity. The defeat of the strike killed you. You chose to put your soul out of the orbit of daily reality. It was your choice. You are one of the most respected men I've ever met.

BE PEACEFUL NOW.

I LOVE YOU - Morgane -

The following contribution was intended to be informally called out from the funeral assembly - perhaps provoking dialogue - though, in the event, through-put of services, prevented it.

It's a little difficult writing about John - I haven't seen him for over 8 years and not spoken to him for about 6 years, as he kind of broke off all contact. Not exactly a break, more to do with alcoholism - letters not answered, phone cut-off, etc. Not so much malice as indifference, the product of defeat. Great defeats, with all their often concomitant emotional breakdown breed self-hate and contempt as well as guilt and even fragments of psychosis. Most people only saw John at the end, as how he behaved towards them: not how he behaved towards himself, nor the history of what was behind his behaviour, especially the devastating failure to break on through to the other side, the defeat of '85, and the nail in the coffin of the early 90s with the vicious wholesale pit closures.

But my memories are of before the last 8 years, memories of someone else, someone who I talked, walked, talked, drank, drank, got stoned with, went on holidays with, had lots of Christmases and New Years with, drank, drank, walked and talked with.

We met a few days before Christmas 1984, ten months into the strike and only a handful of scabs, amazingly solid, considering. Me and some friends had been accumulating kids' toys liberated at amazingly reduced prices (free) from various toyshops over the previous 3 months or more, all expressly collected to give to striking miners' families at Christmas, We'd given over half of them to some Durham miners and had intended to give the rest to other pits in Durham, but the warmth of our reception from John (and Jenny) made us decide to give the rest to Kiveton strikers. Within a minute of us walking in - complete strangers - John was offering us some homemade

only characterised the earlier stages of the strike. As more and more people became motivated and started to take all kinds of individual initiatives without first informing head office, the union, or more particularly the local branches tended to go with the flow and seemed to dissolve into the wider movement because of all these additional, new ingredients. Thus our strike headquarters was the local NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) as it was also a drinking club (if you could afford it, although home brew a, not for sale, asset tended to be its main liquid refreshment) as it was for all other locals, as it was a place where all supporters initially headed for, as it was also a venue for gigs, parties and having a good time. The women too made an enormous difference particularly the way the momentum transformed each one of us in individually different ways. It even penetrated right up to the Barnsley central command. I was there amongst a group of women that went to see Arthur Scargill in his bungalow near Barnsley over something that was concerning us. He opened the door and ushered us in saying: "You must excuse me but I'm ironing" and proceeded to talk to us with a pinny on while ironing his shirts! Yet this was the man portrayed in the media as a dictator or as in the case of The Sun as "Mine Fuehrer." Sure we all collapsed in a fit of giggles once we left. Yes, Scargill was a bureaucrat and not at the centre of struggle like we were, but he had a way with him that grabbed people which the media deliberately neglected. He could not only be the house husband but a stand-up northern comedian on Blackpool pier - a characteristic JD rated whilst criticising his chauffeur driven car.

For a mother with young kids picketing wasn't so easy. I would get up at 4 am for the early picket when the scabs went in, then back home to send the kids to school, then down to the strike centre to make parcels and help with individual strikers' problems. I also took part in demonstrations, or assemblies, when bailiffs were coming to shut off gas and electricity supplies. Sheer weight of numbers could force them to beat a retreat. I have pleasant memories of all the men farting on picket lines as they'd just rolled out of bed and headed on down the road. No pomp and circumstance here. Later, between mid-May and mid-June, the set piece battle for the Orgreave coking plant situated between Kiveton and Sheffield commenced. Seeing it carried on day in and day out I gradually became part of the canteen staff ensconced in the cricket club on the playing fields just off the Old Retford Rd at Orgreave. I always tended to be busy here preparing food. On the day of the really big battle on the 18th of June 1984 when police moved in en masse I never even realised what a massacre was taking place until men covered in blood started turning up in the cricket club. Details like that you cannot forget....

Orgreave meant our hatred for the police, on returning to the Kiveton picket, had really built up. The coppers were parking their prison vans in the nearby pit yard. The pit canteen had been taken over by them, though they used the now famous, heritage-listed, clocktower as their prison. Efforts to grab me met with success only once and I was then stripped searched by men not women. The coppers were leering at me and there was much sexual innuendo. It was very humiliating. Now when confront-

coppers and shouted: "I'm shaking it boss" as he shook the hawthorn bush. We laughed our socks off

It wasn't always like this. Once things started hotting up what with the scabs and everything else, the police really were out to get each one of us individually. I'll never forget the day when hour upon hour myself and John and another guy hid in a big ditch from mounted police. They never found us. There were so few scabs initially they couldn't do any work so, as I've mentioned previously, they just lounged around in the canteen all day. John and I decided on an ingenious plan. We managed to get hold of a loud hailer and hid in the tall, thick bramble bushes across the railway from the canteen. We'd found enough unsavoury details about them from ex-girlfriends etc to get really down and dirty. One was useless in bed, one couldn't stop wanking and "Newbould, you're so smelly, that's why your girlfriends kept clear of you" etc. Psychologically the continual barrage was devastating and evidently was playing havoc with the scabs minds. Cops and management were furious as they well aware of the demoralising effect we were having on their pet scabs. So they sent in police dogs to get us.

As Kiveton was close to the Nottinghamshire borders, in the first few weeks of the strike miners mobilised in flying pickets along with others, descended on the Notts coalfield where mass scabbing was rampant. Although this sprang from a spontaneous desire among the ordinary strikers the targeting certainly wasn't. Much was made in the national press in late spring 1984 of the outta control hooligan behaviour occasioned by the 'invasion' of Nottinghamshire but it really wasn't like that. The central headquarters of the NUM in Barnsley – that quaint turreted Victorian castle-like building near the town centre – was the centre of the operations. The high command of the NUM conducted these operations with an iron fist, allowing little independent initiative on the local pit level. Sealed envelopes containing orders were sent out in Yorkshire from midnight onwards by dispatch riders to the loyal troops stationed at individual pits. The envelopes were opened by local union branch secretaries during the middle of the night and assembled strikers were ordered to go in cars, vans etc, to particular places in Nottinghamshire – Worksop, Ollerton, Bevercotes etc. No discussion took place on this level – knowing the feeling there wasn't much need for one anyway – and the strikers dutifully obeyed Barnsley union headquarters. Recently it would seem what is left of the once powerful NUM has tended to re-write history by saying their aim all along had been to picket coke depots, coal transport facilities, coal wharves and power stations etc. and not the scabs. What happened was that one day – two and a half months into the strike or so – out of the blue, the union changed course discouraging confrontation with the scabs, just at the moment this tactic was meeting with some success with more than a few turning turtle and coming belatedly out on strike.

Although these types of orders were issued with all the force of an edict, making it appear as if the strike was being conducted in a totally regimented manner, this

wine, and Jenny was offering us some food. This, from officially the poorest people in the land: poor they may well have been, but their generosity showed how rich in spirit they were. Within a couple more minutes both John and Jenny were talking about the strike and openly criticising Scargill ("Scargill goes up Orgreave in his chauffeur-driven car, gets himself arrested, then gets picked up from the police station by the chauffeur"). Then we went out walking – the first of many walks across Tommy Flockton's, where we continued talking politics, John declaring he was a "Marxist but definitely not a Leninist". Over that period we went down to the picket line, blowing kazoos, whistles, plastic trumpets, etc, a festive atmosphere all very different from the media's image of abject misery.

Once around this time, John overheard in the local pub/club some businessmen smugly boasting to each other how they'd conned some naive punter out of lots of money. John rushed out to the car park and punctured the tyres of their car. Another time, after the agonizing return to work, John told me with a mischievous gleam in his eye, that the expensive machinery of the pit shaft had been sabotaged (with no danger to anybody, of course): who did it is anyone's guess. I remember John, above all, for the sense of fun that surrounded him: him singing songs on the piano, acting and singing in the mad spirit of the song. "I go ape everytime I see you smile, I'm a sing-song gorilla with a carry on crazy style, I'm going to bop you on the head and love you all the while, aba raba ring ting tong, I'm related to ol' King Kong, Baby when you say your mine, With that honky tonky monkeyshine, When you hold my hand I'm a prehistoric man, I GO APE." and us sometimes doing duets; or playing parody folk music on the guitar; or going for midnight walks through the London parks, exploding fireworks; him doing psychological mind-games with Tarot readings; long walks round the Yorkshire countryside where he'd make me realize how ignorant I was about nature (for example, I never knew there was even such a thing as wild garlic, let alone that it grew in England); stoned drunken evenings talking about our problems and about different social movements here and abroad. I already missed him long before he died. His death just adds to the sadness, and above all to the scary feeling of impossibility of this, possibly the most horrific, epoch in history. May this future be faced with at least as much rebellion and humanity as was expressed in John's life.

Love: Nick

A TRUE LIFE STORY WRITTEN WITHOUT NAME NOR TITLE:

by John Dennis

This story begins in the early sixties. I would be just sixteen years old, just entering the world of work. Life appeared good and for me everything seemed possible (people of my age are obliged to say that sort of thing about the sixties). Anyway, Europe at that time had a massive mining industry in which millions of people were employed and on which millions depended. We happily polluted the skies with our smoke and denuded the land and forests with our acid rain. The Beatles were beatling and The Stones were beginning to roll. Good whisky was about two pounds a bottle, beer was around seven pence a pint. We teenagers were being trained to provide the hands and minds that would begin to embrace the white heat of technology. Most of us in the mining communities seemed to have a place in the present and great expectations of the future. Ignorance was bliss and we were blissfully ignorant.

For such kids as myself who did not enjoy an above average intelligence or parents with middle-class aspirations we generally gleaned some sort of education from the secondary modern schools. Thus after spending five years learning the rudiments of social interaction, petty crime and sexual experimentation it would be time to leave and be taken into one of the three great soaks of the young white male in Yorkshire. For the majority it would be the mines, the steel industry or the armed forces. If you consider my family history and the proximity of the coal mines - six within a three mile radius and one on the doorstep - it's not too surprising that I should take what seemed to be the easy option and sign up with the NCB (National Coal Board).

After the primary euphoria of acceptance and a vigorous sixteen week training period a great disappointment befell me and the likes of me. Because we were above six foot in height and weighed less than eleven stones it was deemed that we were physically unsuited to become face workers. It would seem that the ideal face worker should be five feet nine high and five foot six across, social engineering maybe? The shame, all our clan had been underground workers, my father, his father, his father, cousins, brothers, maybe the odd sister, all of them members of that industrial elite, the money, the hours, the social kudos. I was willing to be killed, crippled or rendered lungless, if only I could have carried on the family tradition. Alas, no, so a compromise was made. I would be apprenticed into one or more of the mining trades. In time I would be a

all the kids' names in a hat. Fortunately my two, Sarah and Matthew, were selected. The Daily Mirror organised supervision, that meant no strikers' or parents could be involved which I guess neatly fitted in with the sitting-on-the-fence attitude of the paper and wouldn't offend Labour leader, scabby Neil Kinnock, etc. At the end of a gloriously sunny day Sarah wrote in the sand: "Thank you Daily Mirror". The following day it was the front-page photograph of the newspaper. I wrote back to The Mirror and thanked them on behalf of my children and the letter was published in the letters' page. I then forgot about it until a fortnight later I received a kind reply from a Mr. Palmer from Blackpool saying he wanted to support a miners' family. He'd written the letter in exquisite italic script. Every week after that Mr. Palmer would send us a long letter together with postal orders plus drawings and photos for the kids. It turned out Mr. Palmer was a poor pensioner but the money was really for the kids although he sent me a separate postal order "to keep the house going". He insisted it was "important the kids have treats" and Sarah and Matt would then gleefully bounce off down to the Post Office's sweeties and goodies shop above the railway station. On meeting Mr. Palmer it turned out as a young man he'd fought in the Spanish civil war between 1936 and 1939 and he wondered how it all could come to this. He told us in detail about the Spanish social revolution and both John and I felt very humble listening to his experiences. At the end of the strike all women actively involved were given a silver goblet from the NUM. I immediately handed mine over to Mr. Palmer. He kept in touch with us but died a year later.

Things by now were really getting nasty. At the beginning of the strike I went to see my Mother-in-law, Molly. Rummaging through her odds and sods she presented me with a long hatpin she'd regularly used in the miners' strike of 1926. She also gave me a dram of pepper to throw at the police horses. Thus a long and honourable though buried tradition was reinvigorated: working class women generally of course had never really been passive. It was good advice and 50 years later the hatpin was again stuck in coppers and scabs.

Right from the word go the bridge across the railway on the road to Harthill was a constant battleground about who had control of the picket. It was also where the road narrowed somewhat and if you didn't get there early you couldn't effectively picket. It wasn't just confrontation and we played many an imaginative game against the authorities. One sticks in my memory. A couple of young lads got a job - a badly paid cash-in-hand job - for a few nights as bouncers in a Sheffield night club. A taxi would bring them home at daybreak, or rather straight to the picket line, still dressed in their tuxedos and bow ties provided by the nightclub. These two guys were full of fun as they played on old time music hall as typified in the silent movies of Stan and Olly- even performing a few daft, slapstick stunts. The funniest moment came when one of them lifted, and redeployed to more effect, a moment from Cool Hand Luke in which Paul Newman struggles against been broken in spirit as part of a Mississippi/Louisiana chain gang. Taking a slash in the hedgerow our young lad turned towards the

big wicker hamper strapped to her back. Local legend had it this woman, when alive, collected her drunken husband everyday from the local bier Keller and carried him home in the big wicker basket represented in the statue. Such menial praiseworthy devotion to the louse had obviously appealed to the burghers of this town. Such insults now maddened me and, together with some local women, we graffitied this offensive monument to imbecility. I was gob smacked to find out that in one Swiss Canton women still weren't allowed to vote. In As it so happens, Mrs Thatcher – that perverted, base expression of women's' emancipation and which is about all we can expect from the state – had a holiday home in Zug. There was a coal merchant in the town and one night we loaded up a wagon full of coal from the merchant's spacious yard and dumped it in the driveway of Thatcher's dwelling. It made the national headlines.

I'll never forget this fundraising in Switzerland. Just before going on the platform of a packed meeting in I was horrified to discover I'd been labelled a 'terrorist' in the Swiss national press. Obviously this had all to do with the Sunshine Radio broadcasts and the police were really monitoring the rebellious youth movement there. Fearfully I got up to speak to the audience wondering if I was going to be arrested by the police and banged-up for months. Would I see my children again? Tears welled up. Not until I left Switzerland was I fully able to relax. Later it caused me to reflect how the authorities worldwide are prepared to use the terrorist epithet to criminalise all dissent at the same time as they covertly encourage terrorism everywhere. It's now greater than ever.....

About a month after I'd returned home from Switzerland there was a knock on our door. I opened it to find some clean cut suits with brief cases on our doorstep. Gulping I nearly panicked thinking they were Rotherham council officials perhaps trying to stop our rent allowance or if not that, certainly out to do us harm. They were however immediately too polite and courteous for Rotherham council. The suits smilingly explained they'd come from Basle and stepping inside they opened their briefcases and poured piles of cash money on our table. I rorred and rorred (wept) with tears of joy. To me it just looked like pinched money and I'd never seen so much in my life. Immediately the lot went down to strike headquarters and was distributed throughout the community for shopping as previously explained.

The media, picketing, scabs and the police

Although we rapidly learnt not to trust any of the media once the strike has started, a habit which has continued unabated for the past 20 years scarcely believing one word uttered on TV or in the newspapers, nonetheless the Daily Mirror (if you like the Labour party paper) and despite being all over the shop as regards the strike, organised buses to take miners' kids to the seaside. It was called: "Miners' kids free passes for the Pleasure Beach". Kiveton Park got a bus too but then heartbreak as only 52 kids could have seating accommodation. We had no choice but to put

blacksmith, welder, farrier, learn the mysteries of rope making and in my spare time make tea for the craftsmen, clean the workshop and not complain if I should be beaten up or sexually abused.

So it went busily on until one dull as dishwater morning in 1964 the foreman came to us and gave us our tasks for the day. He began with the opening, "John, Mick, Alan, you've shown such promise in your metalworking skills that the engineer has seen fit to give you lads the chance of a lifetime." We heard the man's blatherings with some suspicion but not with optimism, he was Alan's father after all. What sort of a chance of a lifetime? Some task to test our newly founded skills? Some project in the mine to stretch our physical and mental capacities? Imagine our disbelief when the lickspittle gaffer's running dog said, "Lads, you're going to help build the Chief Engineer a sailing boat".

I think it may be wise at this juncture to explain some of the social relationships between the miners, the village and the employers that existed during the 1960s and 70s. We seemed to be in a period of some consolidation between the barbarities of the coal owners and the savagery about to be unleashed during the Thatcher years. After nationalisation, conditions in the mines improved, poachers turned to game keepers, the NUM incorporated its powers. Investment in mining was massive, there seemed to be a tacit agreement that, "if it was good for the miners it was good for Britain", and no doubt the miners thought vice versa. In villages such as Kiveton Park with a population of around three thousand, one thousand worked at the mine and seven hundred in mining support industries. The old patrimony seemed to carry on seamlessly. The Dennis family like many more had fled the famine in Ireland during the middle of the 19th century. They had washed up on the shores of this uncompromising land and straightaway signed up to work in one of the most barbaric industries in Europe. Great grandfather John had been a shaft sinker at Kiveton Park, his son John a driver of tunnels. I would be the third and the last John Dennis to work at Kiveton Park Colliery. We lived in low rent houses owned by the NCB. The schools, medical facilities owed their beginnings to the miners, even the churches and chapels were built or renovated by the good will and labour of the workers. We would nowadays be described as a close community.

The hierarchy at the mine itself was only slightly revised from the days of the coal owners. The Colliery Manager could be likened to the captain of a nineteenth century sailing ship, his powers awesome, his responsibilities equally so, described by act of parliament he answered for every life, human or animal, every nut, bolt and cobble of coal, the mine and its environs and to a great degree, the social and economic life of the village in his grasping paws. Directly below him on the ladder to fame and fortune, stood peering up his trouser leg, my boss. The enginewright, to give his job description, would be engineer in charge of the mine. In those days enginewrights had so much room in which to line their pockets and abuse their many powers, but one source of

unending conflict between the manager (in charge of overall production) and engineer (in charge of the mode of production) was that machines would be smashed, worn out or sabotaged by the elements in a growing bolshy workforce. From the workers point of view the problem was really simple. It took x number of pounds to buy and maintain a mining machine. It took x number of pounds and two years of valuable time to train a pit pony. The workers earn and maintain their own keep. He or she is not a capital investment. For us the answer was simple. We not only stole the bosses' materials, we stole their time. To the bosses the machine and the pony were of more value than the workers. Also the government had decreed that machines and animals were tax deductible. In those days we knew exactly where we stood.

We all knew the pedigree of our enginewright and we all knew of his predicament in the year of the boat. In 1964 he would have been around sixty four years old, tired and embittered and certainly fraying at the edges. He had married young to the daughter of a second generation colliery manager. He was at that time a lowly machinist, she a lass of great appetite and social conscience. Naturally his ambitions to be an enginewright were fulfilled. Marrying the boss's daughter assured that. In fact in his younger days he was considered a rising star and it would only be a short time before he attained a place on the board of directors, owning several mines in that area. Then for him tragedy. His wheel of fortune and fame developed a flat tyre. It was 1947 and those red-in-tooth and claw socialists went and nationalised the mines. No more would marrying the boss's daughter assure him of a safe passage on his slimy journey from rags to riches. In truth, marrying the boss's daughter scuppered any chance of furthering his career at all. The reason being the reputation of the father-in-law in question. This creature made Josef Stalin look positively avuncular. During his time as Squire of Waleswood and manager of Brookhouse Pit he took his pleasure by sacking any worker who displeased him then evicting them from their homes. Thuggery, buggery and intimidation were all watchwords. But to cap it all he and the mining company owned all the shops and public houses in the village, so by selling them cheap strong beer and relatively expensive food he entrapped the miners and their families into drunkenness, poverty and debt. Even by his contemporaries he was considered an ineffable bastard which must put him in the same league as (fill this space if you know of anyone that wicked who has not been exposed in the full glare of left-wing historians or the mass media).

Thankfully, "the mills of justice may grind slowly but they grind exceedingly small" and the lousy old sod got his punishment in the true and tried English tradition. Firstly, he was given the options of resign or carry on working, sharpening pencils in some obscure office in deepest Doncaster. If he resigned he would be forced to take approximately ten years wages in lieu of lost earnings. His shares in Waleswood Mining Company would be bought from him at premium prices and his pensions would be paid in cash on the day of his resignation. He died a mere 87 years old in his swimming pool on the island of Antigua, some say from a surfeit of rum and rent boys. His days of

formation. But for those who have not experienced a similar situation, it never quite works out like this in practise, and no matter what you always get your security lapses. Nevertheless our phone was constantly ringing with people contacting us not only from most other UK cities but also from Ireland, Spain, Germany and the majority of other European countries and Australia. The Americas were soon to follow.

One day a guy called Luke phoned from Switzerland asking us if we'd come to Basle. Somehow, this Swiss youth had got our phone number in London. A few days later Luke turned up on our doorstep, his head shaved and dyed black with red spots – a ladybird haircut. He was with a few other young Swiss people. They had a big pot with them which one of their Mam's had made up for them full of different Swiss cheeses to be melted which we all dipped into. It was our first experience of fondue. It tasted smashing. Then these young lads and one lass went on the picket lines for a few days. Before his departure Luke made an arrangement with me asking if I could make a regular report on the strike for Sunshine Radio set up in Basle. It was then played live to a Swiss radio audience.

Little did I realise at the time but I'd made contact with the Swiss autonomous movement based mainly among young apprentices, though the unemployed and students were also involved. In previous years there had been riots in Swiss cities like Basle and Lausanne. The Italian Spring of the late 1970s had also been an influence on them. In fact Radio Sunshine was based on its more famous predecessor, Radio Alice in Bologna which had been closed down by the Italian state. I was only able to make these connections later through others explaining a bit of recent history to me. I'd of course got a lot to say and I didn't mince matters. By then in was August 1984 and the scabs were really going in, though they weren't turning over any coal, merely sitting in the canteen doing nowt waiting for tainted money from management. The infamous "Silver Birch" (an ageing apology for a real miner whom we referred to as "Dutch Elm disease") was doing his dirty work and, as to be expected, applauded by the media. On the Swiss airwaves I gave 'em hell along with the police, Mrs. Thatcher, the TV and everybody else who was against us. Finally I journeyed to Switzerland for ten days. My, oh my, how things rapidly change for the better on so many levels when a real insurrection is unfolding daily! On arriving in Basle I ended up at the Sunshine Radio station only to find a queue of people outside the building wanting to talk endlessly about the strike. This time my lodgings weren't a squat or a brothel but a Swiss trade union rest home situated in Alpine scenery where I slept under the biggest quilt I'd ever seen.

We travelled around the country from Basle to Zurich and Lausanne stopping off at smaller places all the way. One such place was Zug just beyond the top end of Lake Lucerne. In the centre of this rather sleepy town was a statue of a woman with a

The punks at Rotterdam harbour met us and they immediately took us to our spacious lodgings in, of all places, a disused city brothel! It was brilliant staying in this brothel though my real problem and a source of embarrassment to me, was that I had to sleep, albeit in separate single beds, in the same room as Albert. The Dutch being so broad-minded rightly hadn't even considered this. And in no time my fears evaporated. The brothel didn't bother me in the slightest as the prostitutes and working girls were all behind the miners' strike including the bisexuals, the transvestites and the queens. One night three of the proper queens attended to my needs with one manicuring my fingernails, another my toe nails while yet another brushed and pampered my hair. It was so gloriously sensual and I just loved it. Another night in the brothel a pet mouse race was organised. One of the mice was called Thatcher and we placed bets on the mouse to lose! Albert thought the place was wonderful too, though he never knew where to put himself.

Fascinated as we were by all the places we visited, including Amsterdam and Utrecht, neither of us could ignore that the port of Rotterdam was shipping scab coal into Britain. As we went down to the wharves where all the coal was dumped by huge caterpillar loader & dumper trucks to be stored in big heaps, Albert had sussed out that security was lax and that the harbour walls were free from surveillance. We pointed this out to some of the young kids we were with and during the following night a big dumper was mysteriously pushed into the harbour. The young lads had rapidly got the message! They were excellent. Over the next few days this action made the headlines on the Dutch news broadcasts and perhaps also helped in raising more money than we expected.

As the strike continued although I sorely missed my children, I was less and less at home. These excursions left me completely knackered and was so bloody glad to be back home, made all the better knowing John was just waiting for me to return. The reality was that John loved me more than ever and our passion for each other became yet more intense, lit up by this extraordinary situation of a social civil war. It was brilliant even though circumstances had also created an extraordinary role reversal too. Previously John saw little of his children simply because of shift patterns and sheer hard work. The strike meant our children forged bonds with their Dad they never would have had if it hadn't been for the strike. John was simply lovely with the "bab-bies" as I still called them even though they were really growing up and John quickly found where the Hoover lived.

John was also on hand to take all the telephone calls. At the beginning of the strike my Dad, even though initially not too sympathetic to the strike, agreed to pay the line rental. Fearful the line would be tapped by the government's secret police (it was) he requested we didn't make outside calls in case the state might use indiscretions to glean information or fabricate evidence to incriminate us. In fact on the phone we always tried to be as careful as possible and were always cagey about giving out in-

shame and exile must have given great satisfaction to those many poor and damaged souls he inflicted such gross inhumanities upon. But worse still our poor enginewright was shuffled to the sidelines, there to waste his remaining years, a frustrated Brunel. His wife, now of independent means, would desert him at least twice in the year to do good works in the East End of London or to sojourn with struggling young artists in the steamier regions of Italy. His children despised him, his colleagues pitied him and we made his life as unhappy as he tried to make ours'.

At times of great despondency he would unburden his woes around the pubs and clubs of the villages. It is said that during one of these two-bottle unburdenings he came upon the idea of building a boat that upon his retirement would take him through the canals and rivers of England and thus escape the miseries of mining and the contempt of his family. The spirits guide us in mysterious ways.

Between the Pit Manager and the enginewright there was an old festering conflict. As an ex-lover of the engineman's wife the manager knew well his propensity for drink and theft, but the enginewright knew of the manager's weakness for cooking the figures (which enhanced his bonus) and the fact that bedding another man's wife would not enhance the happiness of that pillar of the local Methodist community, the manager's wife.

The dimensions of that boat would be thus: in length 18 feet, in width 6 feet, the mast 16 feet tall, the hull to be made of supermarine plywood, the fitments and fittings to be hand crafted, the engine to be a two litre Coventry Climax converted from the pit potable fire pump, hydraulics and pipe work gratis from Doughty, the labour and time gratis the NCB. It was to be built in the carpenter's workshop but hidden from prying eyes by a canvas partition.

My tasks from the beginning would be to hand finish all the many copper and brass fitments which would be delivered from the foundry in a rough condition. It's strange how fortune seems to favour the favoured. In this case it manifested itself in the guise of the foreman carpenter, his war service had been spent in the construction of torpedo boats for the British and US Navy. After five years of bending plywood in some Norfolk backwater he could nearly do it blindfold. The sealords work in mysterious ways.

At the start of the project we didn't mind the painstaking and repetitive nature of the work, after all there was a certain thrill in taking part in such a scandal. Then there was the fact that much of the work was done outside production time. This meant working Saturday and Sunday, time and a half and double time respectively. Add to this the fact that if we felt like a lazy hour in the workshop we would take a small work piece, place it in the vice and pretend to file or polish it. The foreman would peer over our shoulders, put his finger at the side of his nose, nod sagely, then slope off to pester some other unfortunate.

But alas the novelty began to subside and maybe the work began to suffer as a consequence, or maybe we were beginning to react to the attitude of the enginewright. He was becoming obsessed with the time the work was taking. He would stride down the workshop, arms waving, spittle splashing, eyes popping. "Two hours to polish a bollard, that's bollocks Dennis!" This hurt. All craftsmen know the adage, "More haste less speed". It's imprinted in the back of our minds like a mantra, so we naturally resent such talk.

After work we'd sit in the pub and talk of the really important things such as money, sex, money, Alan's latest wet dream (they were becoming really bizarre). The things that had got up to in his sleep would keep a Jungian trick cyclist in work for a lifetime. On the afternoon of the gaffer's outburst about my bollocking bollards, he related his dream of the night before. It seems he was page boy to the mother of the queen. It involved him guiding the penis of the queen mother's horse into her vagina (which was tastefully kept from view by a tartan blanket) while he was being masturbated by the young Princess Anne, naked but for a golden miner's helmet. Bloody hell! Then we'd talk about money again, the advantages of the condom as a device for halting premature ejaculation, the quality of the beer and then finally the boat and how everybody but the bloody enginewright was becoming so disenchanted with the whole bloody project.

Things took an extra turn for the worse a few days later when the enginewright brought his new assistant to the workshops on what could be described as a guided tour, during which he mapped out the pitfalls, snares and traps his prodigy would encounter in his daily dealings with the proletariat. In fact on passing our workbench at which I was putting the final shine onto another (or was it the same?) bollard the old snake said to his new gofer, "Watch that bastard Dennis. He's idle, shifty and he'd steal the coat off the back of a leper." I was most offended, shifty indeed! I'd never been called shifty before. This new guy was of old mining stock but had just graduated from Sheffield University. He had the wit to understand the boat situation but from the onset he had made it clear that he would collect feathers in his cap if by hassling, hustling and bustling he could expedite the completion of the "Marie Celeste" (as the boat had now become known to we three apprentices). To these ends this man would be found prowling the workshops at 6.30 in the morning. Management in its senior forms would never be seen before 9a.m. if the good running of any enterprise is to be assured, workers in all walks of life understand this basic tenant. This guy would appear before we'd finished wiping the sleep from our eyes and say in a loud voice, "Right men, let's show the boss what we can do. Come on, let's get cracking!" Indeed one morning he said to the foreman, "Get the bollard boys off the boat work and onto some fucking pit work. It's a bleeding disgrace this workshop." Imagine the foreman's shame at being usurped by an overweening toe rag the likes of an assistant engineer. Also the added shame of having his son described as a "bollard boy", this epithet

full of themselves and full of fun too and just bounced into the miners' club. It was the evening and in no time things just started flowing as big butch miners were all dancing with the lady boys, loving every minute of it. It was ace and I just loved it too. For hours upon hours it went on and on through the night. In the club among the miners it all started out with: "I'm fucking well not dancing with a lady boy" but then a few hours later it was: "I want to dance with your lady boy" and really mean it!

Journeying to the ends of the earth - or so it seemed!

While in Peckham I met some Punks from Holland, all done up with their spiky hair dos with safety pins through their noses and so on. They wanted to get involved on the picket lines so I told them to go up to Kiveton, giving them our address and off they went. John didn't know they were coming, nevertheless he opened our door to them and said: "The house is yours" and he took them on the picket lines everyday for a week while I remained in London. The strike produced new roles all the time depending on what you were good at or on what previously hidden capacities it brought out in you. We were noted for our open friendliness. John especially was very amenable and amiable and in a way, we acted as hosts for the village, the strike's lodgings, if you like. at number 14, Ivanhoe Avenue. Strangers were sent there from all over the world.

As soon as the Dutch punks returned home they were on the blower to us asking me to go to Holland on a fund-raising trip. The union office then intervened saying they wouldn't let me go abroad by myself. I protested. as by now I was becoming more confident and the strike was really begin to transform me as a person. I got mad insisting I wanted to go abroad by myself. The union was adamant and declared I had to go along with Albert. What about the cost though? Ingeniously this was solved as Persil soap powders at the time were awarding a two for the price of one deal provided you had cut enough Persil coupons from the soap powders packets. Again the pensioners came to our aid and we soon collected enough coupons and so off we went, Albert traveling on a Persil coupon.

Initially it was all rather embarrassing as I'd never been away with another man before. Despite all my recent personal breakthroughs, nonetheless I was shy and tongue-tied and didn't know how to hold a conversation with Albert. But Albert with his usual sensitivities towards women twigged on to this tremor and broke the ice by telling me about bridle harnesses. Intrigued as to what they were I got absorbed in his story as he explained he'd been on aircraft carriers during his stint in the RAF and the great slings that steadied the aircraft as they took off and landed, which I'd seen enough of at the cinema or on TV, were the bridle harnesses. After this things got easier and easier between us.

all the porridge! It was real good fun.

Of course many of these people helped us out financially and became our firm friends. Equally though there was more than a fair share there for the ride, imbibing the atmosphere while poncing for free food we had paid for but could ill afford ourselves. 'Big' names joined the throng and you wondered just what was their angle? Jeremy Paxman, the future "controversial" and "combative" host of the TV Newsnight programme was all nice and pleasant with us, even downing a bit of food. He departed late in the evening. Then about 3 in the morning John and I were woken up with a loud knock on the door. It was Paxman. Evidently he'd gotten half way down the M1 motorway to London and realised he'd left his expensive scarf. He came back all that way just to collect it! We were left simply shaking our heads at the meanness of it. Surely he could have left it, or phoned us up to say keep it as a donation. Him with his house now worth at least £3 million in London's Kensington! Then there was Benjamin Zephaniah, the Afro-Caribbean poet who in 2003 handed back his MBE medal in protest over the Iraqi war. He didn't ponce but you wondered what he was doing among us. It was as though it was the in thing to be seen among the miners – essential for his radical image. It wasn't as if he cared to talk to you face to face. He'd brought his retinue with him and he was more interested in how it played with them. You could perhaps understand if he wanted to declare his solidarity with the Afro-Caribbean miners who had joined the work force – one who had been tragically killed – in a pit disaster at Lofthouse colliery near Wakefield a few years previously.

At that time in the early 1980s, the gay movement was in a considerably more open and better shape than it is in today. But there again what isn't? Capitalism had yet to invade and derail us on so many fronts to the point where people no longer have any sense of themselves. London Pride supported the South Wales miners, though that didn't mean they didn't look elsewhere. The squat scene overlapped with so much of the contemporary musical charts that along with the gay ingredient, it was hardly surprising I quickly met up with post punk bands, especially Bronski Beat and Jimmy Somerville. I hadn't a clue who they were but Jimmy was always nice to me, respectfully calling me Mrs Dennis even though they were number one in the bleeding hit parade. The band said they'd be delighted to give a gig in aid of Kiveton and then come up and see us at the club. Back in Kiveton I told the club/union secretary about this and he replied: "Never heard of 'em. They're obvious wankers wanting to get in on the ticket"! I went on to say that Bronski Beat had said they'd pay for everything so we'd have no expenses we could ill afford. He was finally only convinced when a number of miners' young teenagers, including our Sarah, scornfully mocked his blinkered un-hip take on the contemporary scene. And on this level, kids know best!

One famous weekend a group of gays who had attended one of my London meetings turned up and their band got out giving us all the money they'd earned from their gig. They were all done up in lipstick with fishnet stockings and high heels. They were

was to remain with Alan for many years. In fact to this day when father and son are seen together the cry will go up: "Here comes Blacksmith Bill and his bollard boy," a remaining stain on a proud working family.

The situation finally came to a head one morning when the assistant discovered the foreman blacksmith trying to fold a piece of canvas into the boot of his car. The assistant with his usual calm and considered approach said, "Right! What do you think you're doing stealing the Gaffer's sailcloth?" The blacksmith replied, "This is not a sail, this is a hammock for my back garden, so fuck off". The assistant stamped his feet, turned pink, turned purple, whipped off his helmet and kicked it across the car park shouting, "Right, that's it. You're sacked, fired, I'm going to have you prosecuted." You may have guessed that by this time everybody called him Mr. Right. But let's not digress. The assistant went to the manager, the foreman of the Union and the rest of us looked like going on strike.

In 1964, my father and the pit manager would be 53-54 years old. They'd both left school at 14 years of age and had started in the pits as pony drivers, their job to lead the pit ponies pulling the tubs on their journey from the coal face to the collecting points. To the pit bottom it was an arduous and dangerous journey. In those days it was a rigorous training for even harder things to come. Their careers had parallels in time and in some ways circumstances. When I look at photographs of my father as a teenager at 14-15 years old I can see a child but eyes are already ageing beyond his time. His body is that of the small Dennis's - around 5' 6" (full grown 5' 9"), big shoulders, thin waist, long arms and those silly tendril-like fingers that we'd all inherit - except for his hands the perfect mining shape. Early in life George, through the influence of his beloved mother learned to and became a talented violin player. The manager at that same age found that most cherished of Yorkshire sports, cricket.

During the 1926 strike father learned hard lessons about the lack of solidarity of the English workers when threatened by the middle classes. In the late twenties he joined the Communist Party. Our manager in the meantime through his ambitions to rise in mining and his contacts in the higher echelons of cricket became a deputy (underground foreman). Father led a local dance band, the manager led Workstop cricket team and was very active in the North Notts Tory party. They both married in the late 1930's. The manager left the Tory Party in 1939 because of the appeasement of the Chamberlain government. Father left the Communist Party in 1941 when Stalin signed the non-aggression treaty with Hitler. In 1964, father at that time was union secretary, enjoying all the benefits that the position accrued to him, one of which was having intelligence on all the dubious doings of his membership at the mine at that time. Mr. Right had hardly finished his tirade in the car park before father was on his way to the manager's office with certain cards to lay on the table and a few kept in reserve up his sleeve. His main argument was really direct and to the point. If any action were taken against the foreman blacksmith he'd be on the phone to the area of-

fices describing the scandal of an engineer who seemed to think he was Noah and his upstart assistant who didn't understand the basic rules of one illegal item for the management meant one for the workers. The manager didn't even alter his countenance, he just waved his pen in the air and said, "George, what do you expect from a young lad straight from college. Let's talk about getting a little bit more effort out of these chaps down in the headings." To father that meant the subject had been settled satisfactorily. Mr. Right was less than satisfied when he was called to the presence later that morning. The information came back to father via the manager's personal secretary, who was allowed by the manager to hand down information to the workers when the occasion suited. The meat of the interview was as follows. "What do you mean stealing canvas? There's enough canvas in the stores to fit out the fucking Spanish Armada. Mind your ways laddie or it's the Scottish coalfields for you".

Young Mr. Right, a well chastened assistant, was very subdued for long into the future, but still given to uncontrollable helmet kicking when primed and fired by the expert wind-up artists.

Let me explain my piece in the jigsaw. For example, as many as fifteen bollards would arrive at the mine from the foundry. The attachments look like the letter "I". They are fixed firmly; thereby ropes can be safely tied off and sales and masts can be made secure. Each small brass object would arrive from the foundry in a rough condition. To make it smooth the sharp edges had to be taken off with a very coarse file. Then marks and gouges had to be taken out by a less coarse file until a smooth file could be used to take out those marks, then metal abrasive cloths and then a polish hard and a polish soft. But every time I looked at the boat I was charmed, it's lines, the work, it was becoming pleasing to the eye and to my mind a pest. For my two friends it may have been worse. The fitting of the engine and the keel would be educational but just as exasperating.

Later that day, showered, needlessly shaved and very thirsty we assembled ourselves at the bar of the Saxon Hotel. There we ordered our beers from one of the few Calvinist barmaids in the county of Yorkshire. She held we youngsters in the deepest contempt saying we were doomed to the fires of hell and damnation due to our drinking, gambling, fornications and foul-mouthed unruly behaviour, then promptly gave us the wrong change (always short) and scream for the landlord if we complained. This woman exercised my curiosity no end. She would wear low cut sweaters hardly hiding her upthrusting breasts, the shortest of mini-skirts, make-up by the kilo and then declaim religion in a manner which would have made Martin Luther King reach for his tape recorder.

In those days we would drink our first two pints standing at the bar (why waste time and energy walking?), order the next round, then find a table away from the jukebox and set about the foul-mouthed repartee which would so inflame the senses of our

on strike. That meant only one of them could go on the picket line at a time. When leaving Kiveton Bridge station for the Hammersmith trip, the son – he was called Poppy – said goodbye to me, having that morning struggled finally to the picket in his bare feet! He shouted: "Hey Jen', try get us shoes, not poncey ones but some trainers". Cheeky but nice. By now some of the strikers believed I was so capable I could just do it like that and their shining, believing faces said so. As I've mentioned previously, in between my endless stints hither and thither I was constantly on the picket line so I had all this knowledge at first hand. On stage at Hammersmith I mentioned this and then the heckling began as some people started mocking me calling me "a drama queen" after I'd suggested that people should leave their shoes at the meeting and go back home in their socks and bare feet to see what it was like. I may be very emotional and dramatic and obviously so but this was too much. It's also something of a trait among feisty Yorkshire lasses so I snapped back: "You say you support miners, well then, leave your fucking shoes". Some did! Finally I did go back home with a sackful of shoes, even a pair of American Jordans, and between Kiveton Bridge station and the club my sack was torn apart by young miners who like Cinderella retorted: "I don't care if these shoes hurt cos' they're just great". This incident really sums up the strike, at once a throw back to the poverty of old just like we read about in the history books mingled with the style/image consciousness of the modern day both jarring and blending together at the same time.

If you like this incident illustrated some of the tensions and probably modern contradictions in this type of situation. Around this time some of our French friends showed John a photograph of some dapper young Spanish men done up in straw boaters, striped jackets and sporting elegant walking canes, promenading for all they were worth in Brussels. A few years later two of them, Ascaso and Durrutti, now with rifles in hand, were to the forefront of a profound social revolution! Let's face it even in mining areas in 1984, consumer capitalism had made far greater inroads than it had in Spain in 1936.

One further point, after each meeting and this also applied to Hammersmith Palais, I'd say: "If you don't believe me you can come to stay at our house". And some did... And some are still real friends.....

Although we as a family always tended to be welcoming, throughout the strike our home became a veritable open house with few nights without visitors. At our final 'Thanksgiving' party when the strike had ended, there were well over 40! In the bathroom, 2 slept in the bath head to tail with 3 on the floor. Thank goodness we had a tiny lavatory that was separate. My Sarah's bedroom was turned into a girl's dormitory with 18 women sleeping on mattresses on the floor. The kitchen was left open all night where a card school was in full swing. That's also where the home brew was stashed and for two nights JD never slept. Can you imagine me cooking breakfast for 47 people with some wanting poached eggs, some fried, some scrambled - never mind

class groups, brimming with etiquette and snooty manners. They would, for instance, lay on some fancy snap when I'd been used to cabbage and onions. This having been my staple diet for months I simply couldn't digest quail eggs, smoked salmon and other delicacies and at one point I became proper poorly. This went along with many condescending mannerisms, which I found irritating. One in particular really got me mad: "This is Jenny, my little miner's wife"!

One meeting I attended in the south west of England really stood out. I was invited to a posh venue full of snotty-nosed, upper middle class people many with cut-glass accents. I turned out my usual speech – impassioned though it was – enumerating the difficulties and money problems we were experiencing, recounting many a true personal story for good measure. I then asked the audience to make generous donations if they really felt about the plight of the miners. Then the collection kicked-off. Looking on, all I was seeing were a few coins dropped into our buckets covered with stickers supporting the strike! From feeling over-awed among these posh people I exploded in full-throttle Yorkshire accent virtually calling them a bunch of mean bastards. "Coins, coins, coins, coins. How about some £5 or £10 notes? Do you know duck (pointing to a well-attired woman in the front row) what it's like not been able to give enough snap to your bairns"? I really put the boot in pointing out how they were sitting on their arses passively identifying with the strike from a safe, cocooned distance. For sure it did the trick and the audience started coughing up the notes. Then a guy with a very smart accent stood up and said: "The gal is right you know, why don't we do something ourselves right now". Apart from he was saying "fuck" every other word. We, in the mining community, never swore like that when women were present, although again that was to change somewhat as the years have rolled by. Still you took all this on board without comment – you had to – if you wanted to get hold of the spondoolies. Anyway this posh guy said there was a lorry depot just round the corner packed with lorries that were daily deployed ferrying coal (from south Wales?) as part of the strike breaking strategy of the state. He suggested doing something, seeing he could supply "fucking hilti-guns". Surprisingly, a fair amount of people got up off their seats and a bunch of us went round the corner to this depot and using the "fucking hilti-guns" wrecked the tyres and wheels of the parked lorries. Seeing the depot was in a remote country district there was also no security! At the end of the night I felt right chuffed knowing the scabs would take time to recover from this deserved pasting.

The Yorkshire miners – and I couldn't help but feel Kiveton Park in particular – unlike say, the South Wales or Kent miners, weren't very good at organising survival strategies and we often went without when with a little more effort we could have eased things considerably. I remember speaking from a stage to a big audience at Hammersmith Palais, West London after the battle of Orgreave in late June 1984. It was the biggest meeting I'd been to and I felt terrified. Stage fright didn't come into it. Things were beginning to get desperate survival-wise in Kiveton. I thought of the family with only one pair of shoes between the Dad and his apprentice son who was also

beloved barmaid. We were thus engaged when in walked father, who with no more ado came up to our table and sat down. "Well lads, I've just come from a chat with the manager and Alan's dad. I think the best solution is for you lads and everybody concerned to get your fingers out and get the bloody thing finished and off the premises as quickly as possible."

I couldn't believe my ears. What was he saying? Rush a job which by my crude estimations would, if dragged out for another three months, earn the people involved at least four hundred pounds in overtime let alone hours fruitful pleasure baiting the bosses? No way daddio! I saw his eyes glint and his shoulder muscles hunch when Mick said, "Bollocks! Whose fucking side are you on? Are you up the manager's arse or something? This is money for old rope and it's going to last as long as we can spin it out." Father turned to me smiling, then as quick as a cobra back to Mick and grabbed him by the throat pulling him over the table and whacking him on the side of the head with his open hand. Mick spun to the floor, mouth open, eyes ablaze and hand reaching for a bottle. Things looked on the verge of serious violence when a voice high on righteousness and indignation rang out, "George Dennis, have you no shame? Striking a boy just out of school, not old enough to vote, let alone see the ways of the Lord. Well, I think it's time you and your Communist kind were hounded out of office and sent back to Russia. And as for you, young Michael, he could no more creep up a gaffer's arse than an elephant's, his bloody head is too big. Now get out the lot of you afore I call the police."

Father stormed out first and we trailed after. This boat business was getting out of hand. As we stood on the terrace of the pub watching father stride away, the words came hissing out of Mike, "if he ever tries anything like that again, I'll fucking have the bastard." Try as I may I couldn't think of any reply that would support him without betraying father. Then Alan said, "Did you see her when she lent over the bar? Did you? Her titties just about fell out, they did. You could see the brown bits. You know the ear holes? Fucking hell, I hope I dream about her tonight. Talk about hard-on." I looked at Mick, we both looked at Alan, shook our heads and headed towards the working men's club. I didn't want to see father just yet.

I arrived home after a couple of subdued pints to find father and mother just getting over one of those rows, the subjects of which tend to rumble on for years between couples who have been married for nearly quarter of a century, in this case, booze, money and the union – mother hated the first, never had enough of the second and resented the third, father loved all three. For the next half hour mother berated the both of us with our shortcomings. These included my moral laxity in not defending father, his propensity for violence, Mike's hypocrisy, him coming from a family that had scabbed during the 1926 general strike and the mortal folly of drinking in the afternoon. When a person like mother took the high moral ground it was wise to sit down, switch off and think of barmaids with big boobs, just hoping she'll finish the tirade before the

potato pie became too cold to eat (see Vol. 1 - "The Matriarchs in Mining Villages" for a different perspective of life when the bounds of their reason were overstepped).

About mother. My mother's father had been killed in a mining accident in 1928. Kiveton pit after the defeat of the miners in 1926 was not a good place to work. The miners at Kiveton had been some of the most militant in Yorkshire. Now the bosses had the whip hand and they cracked that whip with increasing brutality. Conditions and pay had degenerated to almost pre-1914 standards. Mother's family hand the story down that the undertaker had to put stones in the coffin to give the illusion of at least a little weight, there being so little of grandad to bury. The manner of his death was a scandal even for those dreadful times. The man in charge of igniting the explosives (the shotfirer) had set six separate sticks of gelignite, these he would fire in succession. This would bring the wall of rock down in a controlled manner instead of firing the charges simultaneously which would lead to unforeseen and chaotic results. The bloody man miscounted, he fired only five, then ordered grandfather forward to remove the fallen rubble. The poor man was standing over No. 6 shot when it exploded, he took the full force of the blast and was never seen again. All that was remaining could easily have been put into a small shopping basket without filling it. Not even his boots were recovered. The shotfirer was demoted and fined a week's wages, grandmother was given '100 and a pension of 4 shillings a week for life, but only if she would accept that her husband's death was due to his own fault. She had five daughters and two sons. The boys, just out of school, went into the mines. The girls, all except one, went into "service". (this was a euphemism used to describe young girls working for low wages in the houses of the middle classes). All her life mother venerated the memory of her father and would become misty-eyed and tearful at the mention of his name. She was twelve years old when he was killed; she has many stories of the hard life.

Due to a surfeit of Sam Smith's bitter, potato pie and a troubled mind I overslept next morning. When I arrived in the carpenter's shop it was to find Alan staring into the fireplace. The blaze was huge and the heat intense. "What the fuck are you burning, Napalm? That's ridiculous!" I was standing about twenty feet away and my overalls were beginning to steam. I could just hear Alan's reply over the roaring of the flames. "It's that cotton waste you used yesterday to soak up that spilled varnish and paraffin. I threw it on the embers, it warmed up, smoked a bit, then WHOOSH! Fucking great, hey?" "Fucking great? Fucking fantastic, that's what!"

It was one of those occasions on which two people have the same idea at the same time and no words need to be spoken, all that's wanted is time and certain trigger words to channel the thought process along similar avenues. In our case the words were Revenge and Blame - how to achieve our revenge and not take the blame. The conflagration subsided as quickly as it had begun, but it was gratifying to note that the wrought irons in front of the fire place still glowed a dull red after the fire had settled

stood by me all the time I was in London. Collecting money on a main high street she asked one guy for some change. He replied: "I've got none". "OK", she quipped: "Then I'll have the shirt off your back" And the guy did just that! The shirt ended up in Kiveton and Jimmy Mac wore it proudly for the rest of the strike. Unfortunately, the Scottish lass had a boyfriend on heroin and when they turned up at Kiveton, John when finding he used needles, had to ask him sadly to leave - being of course no stranger to drugs himself although he laid off the hard stuff. Hilariously, at the end of the strike when we organised a thanksgiving do for all who'd helped us, the Scottish lass kitted herself out in a flowing gown crowning herself with a large sparkling tiara.....

Slowly though my confidence grew and I suppose I quickly developed some kind of way of wowing the crowds, small or larger. Basically I had to get their attention. Awareness was the real bugbear and unfortunately you became sentient to just how dumb-fuck many middle class Londoners were. Some really didn't know jack shit and how could you get the truth through to them?

I realised, as I've intimated elsewhere here, you had to give 'em stories - real life, throbbing stories. I'd often tell them what the last 3 days had been like. Going to bed tired out then having to kick John out of bed to get on that picket line. To let them know what it was like daily facing coppers leering at you. What it was like getting the kids ready for school in this unusual situation and finally what it was like being a woman in virtually a situation of civil war. I'd talk about our precious humane community in our rows of miners' cottages and just how long the Dennis' family had been there. How John's grandfather was there when the pit was sunk in 1866 and how for 52 years, George, (John's Dad) had been at the pit and on his retirement to be rewarded with only a miniature version of the famous miners' safety lamp which he promptly flung into a nearby field. Was that really all he was worth? (In fact, I secretly rescued the lamp and it remains to this day all polished on my hearth). I think I refrained from telling the audience some of the more gory details - perhaps for fear of prosecution - like how some coppers would not only wave their £20 notes at you and which some of the media had picked up on - but how some would offer you £10 for a blowjob!

In no time I realised I'd come into full contact with the most radical part of the London feminist movement and some of them were really great, working tirelessly for the strike. They tended to live in squats and really weren't part of the artsy-farty owner occupiers/writers scene who had such a high profile in what I rapidly realised was the media oriented feminist circuit. In terms of the practicalities of everyday life they seemed much at odds with each other. Some too were women separatists and I remember one of the squats had a plumbing problem and until they eventually found a woman plumber, nothing moved in that dept. When telling the lads back in Kiveton their jaws dropped open!

Other feminists weren't so appealing and I rapidly came up against the middle

a bicycle, in the evening sitting in a circle a strange cigarette was passed from mouth to mouth. Paralysed with fear and sensing what it was it was simply agony waiting my turn. Was I being tested, were they trying to show me up as just a straight housewife, or was this some type of consciousness raising and did I have potential for other things? Finally the ciggie was on my lips. I took a puff and started coughing all over and felt somewhat whoozy. Finally back home in Kiveton I told John. He laughed telling me that he'd been into "reefer madness" for ages but had never let on! If the first night was memorable, the morning after was even more so. I awoke early and was really hungry. I think we must have eaten everything in the house the night before, so a black lass and me who was living there made to go to the local shop to buy some bread and milk. It was only about 7 am but we'd only taken a few steps when some cops pounced shoving us both up against the wall and searched us for drugs even making us take off our shoes. I'd met the Met! So this was London! Getting back to Kiveton I told the lads on strike in the club. They were horrified as nothing like that happened in our village. And as we all know a month or so later these same lads were also to find out what vicious bastards the Met were.

Nothing had been really arranged by these lasses from Peckham. They just recognised an urgent need and asked me to stay the rest of the week in order to do their best to help us. We began by taking a walk through South London as meetings were spontaneously arranged off the streets at the drop of a hat – a simple walk-in in some small factory or a bus garage or going into the front room of poor peoples' houses usually or, maybe - as time went on - something slightly more organised like an upstairs room in a pub. Every halfpenny was shoved into a Quality Street sweet box and off we went again. By the time I got home my Quality Street box just wasn't big enough and everything that had been donated had been tied up in a pillowslip. When I got back to Kiveton Bridge station some strikers met me. Together we walked back to the club and I tipped the contents of the pillowslip out onto the table. Everybody's face was a picture. I had saved every bus and tube ticket and put them on the table just to be au fait with the accounts. In those first 5 days I had come back home with more than enough baby food. Then a few days later again the phone rang at the club: "We want that woman again"! Thus my strike globetrotting took off...

In this 'new' outside world all of us – men and women alike - had instantly to adapt. In different places far from Kiveton I'd bump into others and would naturally ask what are your lodgings like are you been well looked after, etc. I remember one very young lad from the village earnestly coming up to me in London not knowing if he should eat some strange vegetarian dish served up to him nightly at a squat he was billeted at. In agony he wondered if it was safe, saying, "I think they're feeding me birdseed, Jen". It was his first taste of couscous.

So again I went back to London and Peckham. Some of the girls I really, really did get along with. There was an especially delightful lunatic Scottish woman who

to it's usual level. Our plans had to be set aside for the time being when the foreman arrived to give us our jobs for the day. I was to apply the umpteenth coat of varnish, Alan was to assist in assembling the steering gear. The mechanic working on the boat that day was to be George Marsh. His nickname (but not to his face) was Bog Breath.

That morning we ate our sandwiches and drank our tea and tried not to get too close to George's halitosis, we would look at each other and smirk and use phrases which only the two of us would know the secret relevance. Finally old Bog Breath had suffered enough innuendo, turned towards us and shouted, "Are you two shagging each other?"

This would not have mattered too much had he not sprayed us with half chewed lumps of cheese and onion sandwich, mixed and softened with his usual strong black coffee. We quickly straightened our faces, washed our cups and went back to varnishing and tinkering. After work we sat in The Saxon together playing cards and planning how we could utilise this gift of wonderful destruction without being sent to prison for the rest of our teenage years and beyond. We thought of making electric devices which could ignite the varnish, we thought of clockwork devices, we thought of elaborate fuses. Fantasies evolved and disappeared but with each plan the risk outweighed the gain or proved impractical for our limited skills. As we sat, subdued and thoughtful, becoming more frustrated by the minute, in strode father. "Hello lads, I'm looking for volunteers to carry our "Beloved Union" banner in the carnival on Saturday. You three are perfect. You're young and fit and you'll be given free drinks in the beer tent at the end of the march."

After the nastiness of the previous days Alan and Mick were none too keen to comply with father's proposition, but like Paul's vision on the road to Damascus it came to me - "THE CARNIVAL". Every year the management, the church and the chapels put aside their rivalries and sponsored a carnival on the second Saturday in August. This coincided with the religious harvest festival and the return to work of the miners from their annual holidays. Also every year after this carnival day would follow carnival night, naturally. During the daylight hours of carnival most of the enjoyment was focused on the children, the fairground, the fancy dress parade, the games, fathers being pelted by soaking sponges, mothers hiding pieces of rock and broken glass in the sponges and all the things that make a carnival a carnival. But after twilight things would change. In the local church hall many of the famous rock bands of the sixties would raise the emotional temperature to boiling point. Freddy and The Dreamers would create the adolescent nightmare of unrequited love. The Seekers would be lost forever. In pubescent orgasms, as young girls threw their soaking underwear onto the stage, young men would seethe. Gene Vincent would slink onto the stage, clad in shiny black leather, and promise covertly with his index finger to stimulate places in the female anatomy that young Yorkshire miners had yet to discover. We seethed, being the rough-arsed rednecks that we were. Instead of burning down the church and church

hall, stuffing Gene Vincent's digit up his own arse and giving The Dreamers and The Searchers a nightmare to remember, we would turn inward and fight each other. The cops loved it. After we had finished kicking the shit out of each other, they would arrive and carry on kicking the shit out of us. What a wonderful decay.

We made the molotov cocktail using a wide-neck milk bottle so that the petrol would splash even if the bottle didn't break. Before the end of the shift on Friday I collected all the varnish-soaked wasted cloth and spread it at the side of the boat. All we needed was Saturday night and luck. The decision as to who should do the job was easy. I was the hardest drinker and the fastest runner and, shit, it was my idea anyway.

During the carnival and on the march through the streets we met the bastards who had given us the hard times with the boat. The Enginewright and his assistant shouted to us as we carried the banner, "Nearest you three have been to work in months. Nice work lads. At least you can follow the band." We smiled. We took part in the games that children of all ages enjoy - drinking, eating, hitting, throwing balls, laughing at others and being laughed at. After a while we forgot our secret agenda and became part of the carnival.

The British are renowned throughout Europe for their inability to deal with alcohol and rightly so. Adults are regarded as children. When buying booze and drinking in public, the times would be strictly enforced. Between 11 'o' clock in the morning and 3 'o' clock in the afternoon you could buy a drink in a pub (then you must rest). Between 6 'o'clock in the evening and 10.30 you could buy a drink in a pub (then you must rest). Thank you Mother State but no thanks. Treat people like children and they behave like children. So it was with us. By 2.30 in the afternoon the consumption of beer had become ferocious. The young girls of our milieu had become emboldened by Babycham and barley wine (a most potent brew devised by a witch and warlock in Norfolk), we young men rowdy and bilious on black puddings, pork pies and warm ale.

The entertainment for the rest of the day was set. As we lounged in the sun, searching for dregs to drink or underwear in which to wander, we became restless at the futility of it all and made our ways home to wash and dress for the evening enchantment.

The off-licence is a peculiar place. It can sell all manner of goods but could only sell booze at the times mentioned above. Thankfully, the owners of these places, and still are, greedy, unscrupulous and totally understanding of the teenage predicament. Therefore, before going into a gig or concert we would fortify ourselves before entering the totally teetotal church hall or equally benign establishment. In those days, under such circumstances, I would drink two or three bottles of Guinness and buy half a bottle of rum to mix with the coke to be bought inside. Alan would buy brandy to give to the girls who had smuggled in Babycham (brandy and Babycham - another potent mixture from Norfolk), Mick would smuggle Bacardi in, drink two-thirds of the bottle, then

summoned one morning to the Kiveton strike centre at the Miners' Welfare Club (the boozier in fact) on Station Rd. Albert Bowness, the local union delegate was there. Kiveton had just been on national TV news invaded by 1500 police and a woman's support group from Peckham, south London had phoned the club asking for a speaker. He pleaded with me to go to London and do what I could. We particularly needed baby food, which I well knew we were running really short of. I was petrified but Albert kept insisting saying, "Jenny, there's really no one else". I still couldn't go and just stood endlessly shaking my head. Finally - a woman's thing - I blurted it out: "Albert, I ain't got no decent knickers". I felt so ashamed as the two or three knickers I had had holes in them or were stitched and patched up and what with my matronly, smock dresses, leftovers from having babies, I didn't want to let the side down in what I thought at the time was smart London. Otherwise all I had were the men's clothes I most usually wore on the picket lines. The most important thing though was the knickers! Albert had sensed what the problem was, which was why I liked him, because he was sensitive to women which sprang I think from the respectful relationship he had with his wife, Anne. Indeed he'd already been saying repeatedly; "This strike will sink without the women". Albert immediately came back: "Well, I'm just off down to Emerson's shop to get thee 4 pairs of knickers to go up to London " and he duly did so, purchased out of union emergency funds!

Later that day I was sitting on the train as it pulled out of Sheffield shitting purple cookies. I had a notebook with me I had intended to fill with jottings but it remained empty all the way to London. Albert had walked me to Kiveton Bridge station from the club saying, "get across to them we really need baby food and Jen' try to get as much money as possible". These words remained ringing in my ears but my head was spinning. Instead what was going through my brain was a train ad jingle that was all the rage on TV at the time: "Travelling Intercity like the men do. Intercity sitting pretty all the way".

Finally I arrived at Kings Cross terminal in London and nervously walked off the train conspicuously covered in strike badges so I'd be recognised and in no time I was met by some of the women from Peckham. We immediately got on a bus and my eyes began to open wide as I looked at black people and others from all over the world. (To be sure there was a black guy who worked down Kiveton pit but to us he was always just Nigel and we weren't conscious of the colour of his skin, as he was merely one of the lads). I was immediately aware too that some of the women who met me were lesbians. Then I was taken to the squat that was to become my lodgings. What no rent? Jeez! Moreover, in terms of wealth, London obviously wasn't what it was cracked up to be in my fantasy and I quickly realised even on that first bus journey I was noticing people that were worse off than ourselves. I remember thinking their knickers probably weren't as good as mine!

Encamped in a womens' commune feeling somewhat like a fish out of water or on

one with more than a difference. In the meantime Tony had become brash, outspoken, upfront and very unconventional. In fact he remained so unreconstructed he probably would have been struck off the doctors' register if it hadn't been Kiveton where he practised. He was an excellent doctor though. He knew everybody; he knew all their relatives, their grandparents and their cats and dogs. He had more than an eye for the ladies and was always trying to get in miners' wives knickers and any other fair damsel who'd fall for his charms when trying out his luck! Whenever Tony Collington's name would come up John would shake his head: "Say no more, say no more" and then laugh. Once when a miner's wife went to see him because she was feeling really under the weather, Tony's typical diagnoses was: "There's nowt wrong with thee. Your problem is that fella yer married to. You don't get on with him so why not do thee sen up, get a nice perm, a sexy frock and take off to Sheffield for a reet good time. That'll cure thee". She did just that! I once went to his surgery with a pain in the head. He said: "Jen' you've either got high blood pressure or a brain tumour – which do you prefer?"

In December 1984 I was again having bad headaches, probably due to stress, which many of us showed symptoms of, so again I went to GP Tony. His response was typical: "Jen' there's nowt wrong with thee. The problem is Christmas is coming up and you can't afford anything for the bairns". He then opened his desk drawer revealing a wad of £10 notes. He handed me one saying: "That's for Matt and Sarah and while you are at it tell every other miner's wife in't village there's £10 for them and to come and get it". They did just that. He'd drawn out a lot more than a £1000 from his savings. That was our Bevin Boy GP and I wish there were more of them.



Luke and John on the picket line

Back and forth: Kiveton Park to London

Despite all the worries – mainly domestic ones – I was immediately behind the strike, getting involved in picketing and the like. Sometime into the strike I was

re-fill it with water and pass it round with largesse (nobody ever suspected him) and so the night progressed.

If I remember correctly the group that headed the bill that night was Wayne Fontana and The My Members, a bunch of fortunate 23 year olds posing as teenagers. Wayne Fontana looked old beyond his years even then, lucky bastard. As I watched I became him, as I picked up the pheromones my mind began to wander again - this was not the plan - WHAT PLAN?

Glad to relate that as the night wore on I became drunker by the minute. The rest of the story was given to me the next day. It would seem that the three of us had agreed to separate and then meet up at the bridge on Hard Lane. We then met at least five people walking back to the next village (Harthill) and had drunken conversations. We then strolled through the pit yard, picked up our molotovs, lit them, threw them through the carpenter's window and wandered as pissed as rats to the end of Pit Lane. By the time the fire alarm was raised we were sat across from the tobacconist's wondering what the fuck all these people could be dashing about at. The next day after the admonishments of mother about drinking till early on a Sunday we met at The Saxon. The first pint is the most important after a night when you can't remember how you arrived home or found your bed. After the first sips I asked Alan, "How did it go?" He answered, "Great! Don't you just love the smell of Sunday dinners cooking?" I said, "Who's got the blame?" He said, "Some bunch of drunken revellers from Harthill. Seems they threw half a bottle of whisky through the joiner's shop window and it caused a flashback from that great fireplace that's always smouldering in there. My comment according to Alan and Mick was, "Fucking waste of good whisky."

John Dennis 1998

Postscript to the photo of JD that fronts this text:

Despite writing copious, often intensely aggravated and disorganised notes which increasingly tended towards free form, the above is the only piece of sustained, and perhaps finished, piece of writing John ever did. Maybe JD's jottings, seemingly unintelligible, were trying to plummet things writing couldn't grasp? Even so -if you knew the man - the style is very much for reading out loud and in order to get the nuances of some of the asides, it's almost essential that John should be there to bring out the intended irony here and there followed, most likely, by that almost obligatory guffaw with the drop of the hard (or soft) stuff about to touch his lips. It's in such a context that various seemingly "straight" comments on nationalization -"red in tooth and claw", the union, etc, should, in the above true story be placed. They are not to be taken at face value unless you are constantly noting that mischievous glint in JD's eye!

John's life was uncompromising in the sense that he never took up any position -no matter how seemingly trivial or petty -that could have interfered with his autonomous perspective although, he would never - with his larger-than-life exuberance - have calculated life in such terms. At his funeral *The Wild Rover* was sang by some of his mates. John was wild but it was a more relevant wildness than the voyages of former adventurers. He skillfully played with things thrown in his path. Commodities were constantly placed in a state of disarray thus questioning the commodity form. He watched football on TV with the sound off and collected dolls arms for unknown ends. He'd talk to beer glasses. JD's funeral ended with a tape on which he sang "On Ilkley Moor Bahr Taat." Before that there was a drunken, improvised 12 bar blues about a missing chicken he'd spontaneously given to his daughter. It was a way of telling Jenny what had happened to tomorrow's dinner. It was also a permanent disruption of a passively consumed daily life finally forced into a corner and unable to realise what John really wanted: a full blown revolution abolishing commodity production, work, money, external authority and the state.



Above: The Irish Blue (ab: mariscolare) on the former site of Kiveton Park Colliery. The pit spoil heap is in the background. Where Kiveton Colliery used to be there is now a large, partially grassed over area dominated by the looming bulk of the spoil heap which is being invaded by carr woodland. Without any help it has evolved into an outstanding natural history site. Uncommon flowers can be found there and bird's-foot trefoil grows in abundance. It hosts one of the largest colonies (10,000+) of the Common Blue butterfly in England. Unique variations such as the one figured above occur there. Also it hosts a large Dingy Skipper colony - a butterfly that has recently been placed on the endangered species list. A campaign is now underway to

On this occasion I also recall buying half a pound of anchor butter, which was pure luxury. This was meant to occupy pride of place in a 'buffet' I later prepared in our kitchen to keep miners' families spirits up. We had a big round table in the kitchen on which we laid out the eats. Suddenly I realised that Matt, our young son, was nowhere to be found. We searched high and low but then, bending down under the tablecloth, I noticed this little figure squatting on the floor and in his hands was a half-eaten bar of butter. Right to this day anchor is still Matt's favourite butter.....

There was a period in the strike when money ceased to have value as increasingly a barter system kicked in. You could say swap three hours baby sitting in return for a sack full of vegetables made up of beetroots, cabbages, onions and carrots etc from a big allotment just so a young couple could take a walk through the fields on a summer's night and be alone under the moon and stars. John would swap his excellent home brew and he was really brilliant at sharpening knives. Life went on no matter what and for the babies born there was a communal shawl that I've still got, though it's wrapped in tissue paper to protect it. Our miners' wives group managed to conjure up one wedding dress which constantly was adapted for all sizes of women whether thin, fat or tall.

In recounting this part of the miners' strike its core remains completely relevant because if and when another prolonged struggle ensues, people collectively will again resort to such stratagems and enjoy them but with hopefully a happier outcome.

As a final aside I would say in and around the village people would turn up trumps in the most unusual ways. Our GP was one. During the early part of the Second World War as part of the government's energy strategy, Ernest Bevin, the Minister for Labour and former TUC boss, knowing there was only three weeks supply of coal left, immediately conscripted 50,000 able-bodied young middle class men to go down the pits. They weren't officially demobbed as miners until 1948 to avoid them flooding the ailing job market. They were to become the famous Bevin Boys. Confronted with the agony of death and accidents in the pits, many of these lads were changed for the better by their experiences and ever after have tended to be sympathetic to the miners. The well-known actor, Brian Rix of *Whitehall* farces fame was one of them. Surprisingly (or not surprisingly really) a fair number of them once having experienced the warmth and friendliness of the mining community, found it difficult to return to their professions. They themselves had changed, finding correct middle class behaviour something of an anathema.

At Kiveton Park we had our quota of Bevin Boys. One of them called Tony Collington hailed from a leafy suburb of Manchester and had trained to be a doctor before war service. After the war he simply couldn't leave our village. He became our GP but

to make everybody present wildly happy and legless. Most stuck to his advice as John also stressed that you could go blind and demented on this gear. One night however, a young apprentice turned up at our house and decided to quaff a glass full and in no time at all the lad didn't know where he was. Dashing upstairs to the lavatory he went for a slash only it wasn't the toilet bowl nor was it the toilet! Instead he'd gone into my daughter's bedroom and piddled instead into a new pair of boots I'd just bought her. From that day on the poor lad was nicknamed "piss-in-boots" (a play on words on the puss-in-boots, English pantomime character). Even today, and himself a responsible Dad now, the same tag accompanies him wherever he goes in the area.

It wasn't just food, beer and wine we had to vamp. Women tended to miss different things especially toiletries. I mostly missed toothpaste and washing-up liquid. In no time though we were picking up on old traditions that were nearly dead and buried. For instance we began cleaning our teeth with soot which, as our grandparents had correctly told us, made our teeth like marble. However, as we were without essential toiletries during the strike, others would muck-in to suggest all kinds of imaginative solutions. Unlike us, the pensioners for instance could still afford to purchase daily newspapers. They would save them and cut them into squares threading each piece through a loop of strong thick wire to make rudimentary toilet paper. The same process was applied to the ends of bars of soap threaded through wire in the same way. Both worked well enough. Thus a lot of centuries old things came if you like back into play. We had to re-learn how to make soups from recipes that were ancient when the industrial working class was first formed. These were made from country plants, onions, all sorts of odds and ends, oxos and were added to daily from yesterdays leftovers - if there were any. We really enjoyed them. Inevitably you begin to wonder if you really did need all those fancy things that are the essence of modern consumerism.

We pared our life down to the minimum and learnt how to do without the necessities of modern living. And as it was done with such *joire-de-vivre* and because everybody around us was up to the same thing it took on the mantle of an adventure. Having no choice in the matter why not then enjoy it? We could not afford soap powder so instead we'd run the bath, usually with cold water, and put all our clothes in it. We - me and John - would then climb in the bath in us bare feet and splodge up and down like we were at the seaside singing Rolling Stones' songs -and others - at the top of our voices. We really were getting satisfaction....It is such a good memory....

Later during the strike we were presented with a lot of cash at our door from some fund raising I'd been involved - but I'll tell you more about that later. Suffice to say here it meant every striking family could have £50. A couple of buses were organised from strike headquarters to take us - mostly women - down to the ASDA (now Wal-Mart) supermarket at Handsworth on the outskirts of Sheffield. ASDA of course was chosen because it was the cheapest. Once inside, the first thing the women grabbed from the shelves was washing powder, then soap, toothpaste and toilet rolls.

provide some protection for this amazing brownfield location. We propose calling this site of special scientific interest, "The John Dennis Blues Reserve". We hope John would have liked the idea of playing Leadbelly to the assembled mass of other kinds of blues.

Addendum to proposed nature reserve. Most of the former colliery sites of South and West Yorkshire have, since their closure, become exceptionally rich in flora and fauna. But everywhere there are notices advertising their commercial potential as business parks or as housing estates. And, it seems, it is real estate values more than anything else that are behind the latest round of pit closures in the ultra modern Selby coalfield. On the day before John's funeral I wandered sadly across the ground where the pit shaft winding gear had stood and then onto the huge spoil heap where overhead buckets would deposit their load. JD often worked out here in all types of weather putting those buckets back onto the steel guiding ropes when they became dislodged. He hated this particular job. But as I became increasingly surprised at the amount of wild life that had invaded this seemingly inhospitable terrain my sheer misery began to lift.

The following text was included in the early Winter of 2003 after going through some of JD's notebooks.

The Slow-Motion Suicide of John Dennis

An agonising personal history among perhaps, hundreds of others, set deep within the brutal destruction of the mining community

A Finnegans Wake gone raving of a revolutionary miner

John Dennis was finally destroyed by the defeat of the miners strike in 1984-5. It didn't happen immediately as it was a slow, agonising and torturous drip drip drip giving way to blank despair and madness, to work related illness coupled with alcoholism and utter loneliness. The latter was the worst blow. He became a figure drunken and raving on the streets, barred from all shops, clubs and pubs, a veritable freak young and foolish kids threw stones at even when he could hardly walk through ill-health.

"A worker works with his thoughts in turmoil. It's not fair" (a South African building worker around the time of the miners' strike.)

Throughout these agonising last few years during the 1990s and 2000-2, JD wrote numerous tracts and splurges. They were often kind of poetic outpourings full of a mad jumble/cascade of words and word play. Most of them are 'mad' or just this side of madness. They follow, if you like, in that trajectory from Rimbaud's Season in Hell to Antonin Artaud's crazed writings in the Rodez lunatic asylum, to those in the broken atmosphere after the revolutionary upheavals of the late 1960s who wrote 'schizophrenic drivel' as they tried to come to terms with the still-born death of a revolutionary new world they had nurtured so passionately yet so briefly in an intense period there was no going back from. Most of all, JD's ravings must be put in the latter, bitter perspective, as in between the often inchoate ravings are constant references to capitalism and the fact that a determined and powerful group of workers in the UK tried to overthrow this poisonous old world and thus stand as a beacon to all those throughout the world ' hence the quote from the South African building worker.

These writings are not in the spirit of socialist realism beloved of leftists and ultra-leftists as evidence of workers' growing consciousness according to the hymn sheet whereby the subject of material change gains enlightenment from the revolutionary theorists. To be sure, John was friendly with some of the better 'revolutionary' types of his times but it was never tub-thumping like that as more than not, mutual laughter and simple relaxed enjoyment was the essence of these encounters. More than ever, JD's writings are more the outcome ' in no matter how incoherent way ' of the explosive response to the revolutionary implications behind the self-destruction of modern art and poetry. It wasn't consciously recognised like that but it nevertheless worked its way behind his back in that free form letting go and drift which of its own momentum often desperately searches for the praxis that will change forever these horrible conditions we are forced to submit to. In that sense, JD's musical rantings have more to do with Joyce's semi-nonsensical montage though profound in suggestion, marking the finality of the novel in Finnegans Wake than anything a dull as ditch water, literary leftist follower of Bertold Brecht, could ever have imagined. As John said in one of these tempestuous cries of a damned soul: "Let's begin at the end". Finally the pieces of paper JD emptied his diatribe of words on were often then made into paper aeroplanes he then sent whizzing across his slowly evolving charnel house of a sitting (and dying) room.

JD throughout his life was always full of inquisitive thought responses as he applied his own interpretation to TV, book and newspaper. The family toilet always had books piled high along the tiny window ledge as you inevitably picked up and dipped into as you had a crap. They were always really interesting stuff. Thinking like this, especially for a worker who isn't constantly contemplating weasel word arrangement in order to con some gullible idiot, tended to cut through to the nitty gritty even though painful simply because the whole weight of the totality of exploitation in work & liesure becomes that much more impossible to bear. JD knew the condition well constantly

even said he could make a fine wine out of rank, sweaty socks and reckoned we'd all enjoy it! Certainly he knew what flowers and weeds to pick from the countryside for those special flavours. One of his specialities was tea wine and during the strike the tea leaf strainer was in constant use everywhere as he became the village tester (and taster) in chief, always taking along his thermometer and gauges to test the myriad fermenting brews of wine and beer.

Well before the strike John was famous for his brewing capabilities. Although mining is really hard graft that didn't mean there wasn't plenty of space for fun and games whilst working. In fact larking about was often what made conditions tolerable. In any case management were nervous about coming down too hard on these diversions for fear of provoking things on a class level. It was only after the defeat of the 1984/5 strike that management were able to cut out most of this playful activity thus setting the grim reality of all work and no play that is the essence of today's nightmare conditions imposed everywhere throughout the workaday world.

Anyway, during his nightshift, John sometimes worked in the huge pit engine house packed with all the pit's utilities with pipes and cables snaking around all over the place amid the boilers, heating systems and what have you. He suddenly realised if you could only utilise the beck that flowed into Tommy Flockton's fields at the back of the engine house this was a great place to set up an illicit distillery. Basically all you had to do was divert one of the big but idle copper boilers, then deftly re-route some copper tubing and adding some new lengths of pipe that could be directed into the outside beck and, hey ho, you had a whiskey still. Apart that is, it couldn't be whiskey hooch but it would be a mightily powerful pure alcohol beverage! John then got as many lads in the village as possible who regularly made gallons of beer in dustbins and asked them all for a bin full of brew to pour into the huge copper boiler. Commandeering a pit wagon one night, another miner drove around all the selected houses in the village collecting the beer bins, which were then emptied into the boiler. As John knew about distilling he knew the lads would be disappointed when he had to tell them most of their precious cargo would be wasted and drained off particularly all the poisonous parts at the top and bottom of the boiler. Only the middle portion of the unholy liquid could be drunk and then it was just a matter of waiting. Working on the welding and cutting of various bits of imported machinery so they could navigate the particular twists and bends of Kiveton's underground tunnels, John was able to keep an eye on the fermenting still. Finally each miner who had contributed to the scheme was presented with a big lemonade bottle of pure alcohol.

John in his drunken wisdom advised each and everyone about this lethal witches' brew. In a big flagon of ale to be placed at the centre of the table and that all assembled could pour from, he suggested merely applying a thimble full of the potion

chopped the poor bugger's head off and as the old comment goes - "like a headless chicken" - it ran round the hen house until suddenly keeling over. Wrapping it up in a small blanket it was placed in a shopping bag and the booty was proudly brought home. After plucking it in the kitchen - we didn't want the scab to know it was us - we looked forlornly in the cooking pot: it looked no bigger than a budgie!



JD gardening for the strike

Then one day there was a knock on the door. It was a young lad active in the strike. He'd managed to thief a pig from somewhere, which he'd somehow shoved into the back seat of his car where it was squealing its head off. Having no idea how to go on from here he'd started to panic. Knowing I'd been to evening classes and catering college he thought I must possess butchering skills! I hadn't a clue. Nonetheless, and knowing there'd be blood all over the place, John had a brainwave. Our nearby chickenless scab had managed to get himself a holiday caravan at the Lincolnshire sea-side resort of Skegness, so why not further insult the little scumbag by using his lawn to kill the pig? Once on the lawn and drunk out of his brain, John then cut the pig's throat. We then invented our own makeshift carvery skills and the pig got sliced up this way and that. Absolutely everything was used, the blood for black puddings (our beloved Yorkshire dish), the brains for soup, the trotters, the hide for rendered fat and crackling; simply everything! Nothing was wasted. A few days later the scab returned from his scabby holidays. Seeing the bastard looking at his blood stained lawn and puzzling about what had gone off really made us laugh!

Like many other workers we were all pretty good in our different ways at making ends meet. John had always been ace at making home brew and as the years went by, he became really excellent at producing exquisite tastes from virtually anything. He

returning to his refrain: "No brain, no pain". Once two serious work-related illnesses set in ' bowel colitis and diabetes ' alongside the boozing he found impossible to kick ' that mental anguish springing from sharp analysis plus the unrelenting and increasing physical pain meant his diatribe of notes were flung down at screaming pitch.

First though a little bit of background. Throughout most of his later years at Kiveton Park colliery in South Yorkshire, JD worked as a welder in the workshops near the pit head winding gear where, along with his work mates, he adapted the imported machinery for extracting the coal to the specific conditions underground of the colliery coal seams and tunnels. The workshop was obviously constantly full of noxious fumes and, over the years, it was bound in the best of circumstances to take its physical toll no matter what health and safety precautions one cared to take. JD, needless to say, with his devil-may-care attitude, was none too careful about such things. Increasingly, particularly after the defeat of the miners in 1985, he would have more than a little drink before going to work ' especially if it was a late or night shift. Sometimes he'd take a top-up flask with him and then amid all the acrid welding fumes there'd be that ciggy stuck in his mouth. As he'd often point out, the defeat meant management were nastily on the offensive constantly whittling away at that margin of freedom and conversation that the miners themselves had created before the strike which meant you could have a relatively good time as the craic and banter flowed between work mates. That little flask could take the worst edge of dumb-fuck, vindictive management which also was a major factor in the many flash flood 'ragouts' (small wildcat strikes) that often occurred in the shifts between the defeat and the wholesale pit closures begun in 1993

"Myself is beginning to demolish": (JD 1999)

And then the real horrors. Out of a job, Kiveton Park colliery closed down, followed by an almost instant demolition with only the pit head baths saved by English Heritage (as the miners weren't saved) a worthy piece of architecture set against unworthy people. JD's illness went from bad to worse. Only a decade earlier ' as they had done for a couple of centuries ' the miners had placed their imprint over the whole of South and West Yorkshire. They were respected and looked up to even by fuckhead creeps, rats and opportunists of all description. Now, suddenly they were nothing. Overnight, they had become no people even though they'd often been awarded quite handsome monetary compensation as balm for elimination. But because they were no people this compensation became the means so often for their self-liquidation ' in more ways than one if you get the meaning! Now they had in the palm of their hands the economic lever for complete self-immolation via drugs and drink. It corresponded so often with the immolation of their old homes ' after being quickly moved out and on to another job in another area ' then speedily demolished by building contractors often, at the behest of local government, to clear the area of all memory of an insurgent and humane past. Over the years the clearances got worse. Imagine the horrors on

seeing rows of miners houses in flames in the spring of 2003 at Frickley, West Yorks. (Frickley, that most delightfully crazy of insurgent pit communities who instantly on hearing of the proposed pit closure programme in 1993 dumped lorry loads of coal outside the home of the then, Minister for Energy, Michael Heseltine ' and miles away from the coalfields!) Immediately, on seeing this disgusting spectacle ' the pain darting across your heart and that gigantic lump in your throat ' meant you were witnessing the stuff of pogrom; of insult to injury; of the killing fields.

Alas, if it were so easy to say such dramatic things! These killing fields were carried out with such aestheticism, and a heavily disguised subtlety that truth became almost impossible to define. Self-immolation corresponded with the rush to develop former colliery grounds underwritten by low business rates. Californian style prefabricated sometimes themed business parks with their Call Centres and T-Mobile premises together with middle-income housing estates sprang up everywhere. The undeclared aim of this new urbanism is the elimination of all feeling for the areas' industrial past, apart from token emblems like pithead winding wheels cut into a semi-circle and dug into at road junctions like a gibbet to remind people to forget. A piece of sculpture to contemplate and seamlessly in line with the new urban aesthetic.

Most of the new estates, advertised as prestigious housing development, are for middle income personnel, fresh to the locality and related to the economic needs of a recent hi-tech presence. The sales pitch of Estate Agents includes a 'pretty' outlook or the eventual promise of one, as, yet again, the scars of Yorkshire's industrial past are suitably levelled and grassed over. The former mining villages are in close proximity to the economic hub of northern Europe not far across the sea to the east. Gentrification is the name of the game. Gone are the old vast heaped-up marshalling yards and like at nearby Wath-On-Deerne ' only a few years ago designated as "the largest area of dereliction in the UK" - a model country park has been landscaped reminiscent of Regents Park in London.

This then is the grim background to JD's rantings shot through with lucidity and poetic accuracy the more the man became a haunted outcast and total stranger on his own turf. So maybe it's best now to simply quote from a small portion of these generally incomprehensible writings with as spare a comment as possible.

JD outlined some comments on The Ridley Plan worked out more precisely by the Thatcher Government after their retreat on pit closures after the miners' wildcats in 1982 coming so soon after the great urban rebellions of inner city youth in 1981. He called the Plan: "The bluest blue print this side of the drawing for The Titanic" put into place, "so that Capital and the global market would not be seriously threatened again in the UK".

one item of clothing per child. Single men receive nothing. £1 day picket money, £2 week hardship by local union". I also mentioned the DHSS was deliberately difficult with strikers' claims and there was no telephone contact "resulting in many delays causing genuine hardship". (As an aside here, I do wish in retrospect I had kept a diary and I still haven't met anybody from the village who did. Maybe all this was because involvement with the strike was completely time-consuming. Whatever, it is a lamentable gap). (See some of my notes in addendum at end of these reminiscences).

On my future fund (and food) raising expeditions to London and throughout the country and abroad I would mention these things and I always listed the food parcel items as well as showing the last 4 meagre pay slips John had tucked in his pay packet before the wildcat strike broke out in the Yorkshire coalfield. I also endlessly mentioned the £16. 26 pence strike pay the family had to live on together with the £13 family allowance. Remember too, that one of the legislative acts Mrs Thatcher had recently enacted was to limit strikers' benefits cutting them by £10 per week. Many people never realised we were living on so little and such concrete examples certainly helped in getting spondoolies, food and clothes handed over to us.

Inevitably we couldn't live on these meagre rations and strike pay, so we had to find other means of augmenting our survival. Of course some of us had allotments or biggish vegetable gardens but others didn't. We quickly learnt to forage in the countryside and to nick from the farmers fields all around us. So as not to alert farmers to our nightly forays we also quickly learnt to take the veggies from the centre of the fields. Not having a dog capable of catching rabbits we resorted to snaring but there's a real knack to this old poacher's technique and John certainly hadn't acquired it because no sumptuous rabbit stew ever appeared on our table! We did however often have wood pigeon pie and stew thanks to John's Kalashnikov pellet gun and he sure was a crack shot with that.

In fact three months into the strike we were pretty desperate for the taste of real meat and not just dribs and drabs. One night four of us – 2 men and 2 women – managed to get some petrol together to power a picket's car and we headed for the Derbyshire Peaks visible on the horizons from our doorstep. We were out to get us selves one of the sheep that freely roam the moorland. By then any sheep would do – simply some old scrag-end of has-been mutton would have been delicious. If you thought snaring was an art this was brain science and for the life of us we just couldn't grab one of those goddam woollies. They were real smart and we came home empty handed.

Once scabs started appearing in the village in the late summer, they inevitably became a round the clock target. One of them kept a hencoop on his allotment where he reared chickens. We finally managed to nail one as John crept into the coop and

instantly were made to feel at home in the new, though similarly warm communities, like the squatters, punks or gay movements even though the reality of family or work ties here were virtually non-existent.

The miners' subsequent defeat however was to pretty much mark the end of all vibrant community, no matter what its makeup, old or new. The distinction became rapidly academic as all that pulsed with life rapidly caved-in to the pursuit of money, status, buying homes, shopping and acquiring commodities in general. On the empty spaces where the steel works in Attercliffe in Sheffield once stood, the mighty consumer emporium of Meadowhall was built – a funereal headstone if you like to the miners. Although I've never been able to stomach visiting it I've come to regard it as purgatory; a place where I fancied you were forever thrown in if you'd been bad in your life. A resting place for scabs.

Imaginative survival tactics

Because we knew the strike was shaping up to be a long one, almost naturally we women got together to sort out means and ways of survival, organising food distribution, community kitchens etc. Seeing I'd always had to penny-pinch I quickly got involved in fund raising and finally stepped-out to literally meet the big wide world for the first time in my life. It meant continually leaving my family and again I only hoped in future they'd understand I really had no choice.

From July 1984 strike all miners collected a weekly food parcel. It was the same amount of food regardless of whether you lived by yourself, with your parents or had a family to support. Although on the surface this appeared unfair it was organised on this perhaps too strictly an egalitarian level because it seemed the only way at the time that arguments could perhaps be prevented when the over-riding need was to maintain a simple unity on as many levels as possible. The food parcel usually contained 2 tins of beans, 1 tin of tomatoes, one tin of fruit, 16 tea bags, 4 eggs, 8 oz of sugar, 6 potatoes and one onion. Periodically we'd be given some vegetables and fruit from the local market as well as gifts of tinned food from around the world especially France and Russia. I will never forget the brutal way Thatcher impounded Russian gifts at Hull docks. Like most everyone else in the village, pensioner relatives also understood the importance of sticking it out so each week they would also send food to their kin. However, we were considerably better off than the single miners who weren't allowed any benefits whatsoever, which sometimes had tragic consequences. While looking through strike memorabilia in my attic to aid this account I came across some notes I'd made at the time wherein Mark, a single miner, who had to look after his sister and disabled mother, is mentioned. Feeling guilty whenever he ate food, he'd become anorexic. In my notes I put down the following: "Local council provide free meals and

"Margaret Thatcher was the epitome of the uncaring, lousy, bastard politician. A person so corrupt and disgusting that she would surround herself with even worse scum. These people and their party rode rough shod over the shit wits that make up the population of the UK' only to be followed by the Blair clones".

(Increasingly in the 1990s JD hated the rank stupidity of people ' especially those at the sharp end who didn't even begin to get it. Bitterly reacting to the dumbing down spreading like the plague, he clearly saw its impetus coming from the victory of scabs which has all the hatred of the most powerful miners song of all, The Dirty Black Leg Miner, composed during a miners' strike in Northumberland in the late 19th century).

"Small people. Do you understand the meaning of the word, SCAB? For myself, it is anathema. As far as the 'condition humaine' the scab that lives should be cast out, should be killed".

"It's the funeral of the Queen Mother. Over one hundred thousand people filed past her coffin. I don't believe it. It's fucking incredible. These English. They never cease to amaze me. Do they amaze you?"

JD felt that the main reason the Tory Government went to destroy the miners was because of their sense of community ' their spirit of helping each and all ' rather than their potential control over a major energy resource. It was a concrete example of everyday co-operation and humanity that had to be obliterated to make way for the ultra commodification of the individual. He said we needed to explain: "The steady drip feed of temptation and greed, that there is no such thing as a decent, organised society, there's just the individual begging, borrowing and stealing, weakest to the wall and I'm alright Jack, let's pull up the ladder" "bringing about "the destruction by fear and intimidation of a decent benevolent society".

(Two or three times in his raging notes, JD quotes Geoffrey Chaucer, the 13th century English poet, on an utterly selfish individualism grimly and typically noting its merits in one of those arguments he was always having with himself. In a way, you sense he would have loved to have been like this Miller but simply couldn't be).

"Once there was a Miller,
Lived on the River Dee,
He milled and sang from morn till dusk,
No happier man than he,
And if you should ever ask him how it came to be,
He'll tell you,
I care for nobody, No not I, for nobody cares for me."

(I have no idea if this is the correct modern English version of Chaucer as JD would quote these remembered things from off the top of his head).

As an epitaph to the miners' strike he says:

"We were slowly but surely broken (but it was well-signaled) that we would not be able to beat the monster of Capitalism".

" A really blue, blueprint"

"This illustrates our families demise. My wife's physical and mental exactitudes. The collapse of our health, wealth and welfare. My retreat into drink and its ramifications. The steady alienation of our children. Then diabetes, ulcerative colitus for me" ..Point out the drugs, the drink, the lack of any real social cohesion. A very sad story indeed when the poor have to steal from the poor"

"There is no place for Me
Or Thee and many such as We
We are without light in this land
Of Grab and Steal
Although we carry the Knife
Of Justice and Revenge"
"This tirade of bile that I put out
This scream of hate: It's what I shout".

In a way that was the point and the contradiction. Having spent all the redundancy - which is the way of the workers - on a spending spree plus booze and then desperate for money to subsidise his habit, JD contemplated mugging and minor hi-jackings after having been banned from most local shops for inept shop lifting as so often is the case when out of your brain. To be sure, he'd harangue people for money and later feel terrible about it. "How far I would crawl to get alcohol into my being". But then ' and sure sign of his great humanity ' John lashes out at the young thugs who are beginning to terrorise the vulnerable ' frightened himself that he'd heard on the street word was out they were going to form a posse ('possy" JD called it). After all he'd already had his windows stoned as well as being stoned in the street. In particular he notes a young brute who beat up a local old lady, stealing her purse and even the fish she'd bought at the fish mongers. She took two weeks to die. In his alcoholic delirium, JD saw himself as this little old lady and sometimes, even the piece of fish. He poignantly himself expressed some of these contradictions:

"I am going out today
And I'm frightened
No easy way for me today

teeth and finally management asked a foreman to deal with 'the problem'. The foreman went up to the odd couple and quite nicely suggested the lass should stay home and cook for her fella there. Shane's response was to draw his six guns and in his put-on southern American drawl demanded: "Git yer hands offa ma' woman". Shaking his head the perplexed foreman backed off as everybody else collapsed with laughter. Seeing authority could make no headway it was left to fellow workmates - like John - to benignly explain to Shane why he couldn't carry on like this.

Although in these PC times it is easy to be critical of using terms like 'simple' and indeed these people were a constant source of benevolent amusement to their fellow workers, in many ways it was far more tolerant than what takes place today. Those with 'problems' are graced as never before with polite terms only to find themselves harshly excluded and ghettoised by the real workaday world. We grew up in less repressive times!

Street parties and festivities were regular events and we always loved preparing them. The times though had an increasingly radical temper to them and come Princess Diana's wedding in the summer of 1981, we decided to hold something of an anti-monarchy type event although we didn't describe it as such. It wasn't as though we perceived the celebration to be 'radical,' we just did it for the extra fun. In fact we all tended to believe what we read in the newspapers or watched on TV. Despite the combative history of the miners we were law-abiding and thought the police were there basically to help us and generally the village Bobbies were OK and most had family who worked in the local pits.

The anti Princess Di party was great. We all got together and made big mock grenadier guards with busbies, sticking the lot on top of the big back wall fronting the main road through Kiveton. I also decided we should make a number of humpty dumpties to stick on the wall for all the little kids to enjoy. In the evening benches and pews from the local Methodist chapel were pulled out across the terraces and we all had a whale of a time lit up by hundreds of candles in jam jars as we were entertained by a folk group with guitars, fiddles and penny whistles. Some miner also prepared an especially strong elderflower sherry or champagne, which tasted beautiful. My abiding, joyful memory is seeing lots of pensioners' completely legless singing away as they sat on or ,rather, nearly fell off the chapel pews. This, then, is a cameo of our lost community and when the miners' strike broke out under the slogan of "fighting for our communities" this is precisely what we were fighting to retain: a way of living far better, honest and humane than the emptiness, separation, isolation and "lonely crowd" syndrome that induces a generalised paranoia and which modern society has increasingly been embracing since post war reconstruction in the late 1940s. As work and our living quarters were virtually inseparable no wonder we were to fight with such ferocity for something really well worth preserving. It wasn't as though it was old fashioned and backwards. It wasn't set in aspic as, on the contrary, during the strike many of us

Truth to tell though, our family life had hardly ever been conventional. I suppose we'd always been affected by the alternative life style coming out of the 1960s, enhanced considerably by the fact John and I performed folk music and the like in pubs and parties. Though firmly anchored in work at the pit we redefined this new experience for ourselves. I remember the long, involved walks and talks I used to take with John as we'd end up in a field on a summer's night and lie in the grass for ages looking up at the stars and naming the constellations. Or else talking so much in bed that he'd nearly be late for his shift and I had to shoo him to work. Inevitably the kids were brought up in an open, unrepressed way, which during the strike ensured they could share their home and lives with people from all over the world.

In these terraces the close relationship with the pit was overwhelming. When on nightshift it was regular practice for our John to lock us in making sure we'd be safe. In any case it was always easy to make contact. While pregnant with Sarah each evening he left me with a torch. His apprentice worked at the time higher up in the structure of the winding gear and was thus able to see if I flashed a torch from my bedroom window so John was able to come straight home if anything was amiss. More often the close relationship became one of fun. The loud pit tannoy system would be blaring out all the time—usually management issuing instructions or requesting things. The voices to this day still ring in my ears. It was easily accessible however and miners would divert it for other ends. John would sometimes get hold of it and say: "Night night Sweetie". It was quite common too for the whole pit yard to break out into loud, lusty song as someone would start off with a pop tune, old blues number or even a hymn from the Methodist chapel repertoire and everybody would follow. William Blake's powerful poem "Jerusalem", which later became a hymn, was very popular.

Women too were accepted into the work environment at the time and it was easy enough to walk into the yard and have a chat with your fella. Sometimes this acceptance was pushed to delightful extremes. Local pits then also employed people who weren't as bright as a button. They of course were only allowed to do surface work like simple, repetitive tasks in the tub shop where they helped fill the tubs but it gave these people a sense of their community worth as well as self-worth by being absorbed into the workforce where they were shepherded, shielded and encouraged. One such guy at Kiveton pit was called Shane. As a young lad he had become spell bound by the Alan Ladd western – as indeed had many another existentially inclined northern lad fancying himself taking on single-handedly all the corrupt powers that be. Our Shane though didn't just passionately watch the film - he became convinced he was a cowboy! He'd go to work in his Stetson hat with spurs strapped on his boots and toy six guns hanging from his belt. During breaks for snap (food) he'd spend the time perfecting his quick draw techniques. Then one day Shane landed himself a girlfriend who, like himself, was also a bit simple. She insisted on always being by his side – stuck like glue - and went to work with him, bringing out his lunch box during meal breaks. This was initially accepted but the Health and Safety Executive was beginning to acquire

Begging, Borrowing, Stealing
Casting aside my social instincts
Without feeling"

The trouble is he despised himself for this because he couldn't be "without feeling". Even though forced into a kind of fuckheadism he couldn't be a fuckhead and that was the poor man's dilemma. As he said at the time: "My shame makes sense only if we admit my addiction". It's signed "The Celtic Revenge" ' most likely meaning the drink more than JD's Irish ancestry although increasingly he saw the latter as playing its part too.

For a brief moment the de-tox clinic worked and for a year or more JD kicked the drink though often hating to go to sleep hoping for an erotic dream and really dreading those involving alcohol. Suddenly in the de-tox at Bassetlaw hospital after treatment for the shakes and diarrhoea, he laments how alcoholism has wreaked the final havoc on his always refreshingly, open-minded, dysfunctional family. Less anguished, the balance comes back into focus and his profundity clearer. In a way though such self-recriminations shows the over-sensitive humanity of the man. More than anything it was the outside brutality of capital that had caused this but inevitably it was taken on board like some personal guilt. As his wife Jenny said recently, the traumatic defeat of the miners is still tearing families apart and causing agonies for kids who weren't even born during the struggle as the pall of the defeat is bequeathed to future generations.

"The hours are filled helping and hindering each others piece of mind. Most have lives outside this place that are in tatters because of one form of addiction or another. It's mostly booze but there are others that are suffering from drugs given mistakenly then abused dreadfully. Addiction is the watchword. It lurks waiting to put its strength against your weakness and once in control it is without mercy. So endeth the first lesson but alas it is true. Standing in this queue awaiting my relief I soon understand that drugs (medicinal) are being used to fight other drugs (recreational) and I'm the piggy in the middle and if I'm not careful I'll soon be pork in the sandwich".

Throughout the course of his various illnesses JD got to know Bassetlaw well. Seven years previously and before the real hell set in, in 1991, at the time of the first Iraq war he has a most amusing story to tell.

"Jen was returning from Rotherham on Friday. Being bounced like a pea in a pod on the top deck of a smoky, sweaty, South Yorks, double-decker bus. To lessen the agony and hasten the passage of time she honed in on a conversation between two females of pensionable age who were sat directly in front of her. The talk went like this: "Well, I'm beginning to feel sorry for him", says woman No 1. "Who Saddam" say's No 2. "Yes, I don't think it's fair, our lot blasting him all our fancy stuff and all he can throw back

is spuds, no I don't think it's right". Jen says she nearly bit the filter tip off her fag and was still chuckling when she came through the door (to the hospital). But unless they were doing a con job on Jenny knowing she was evesdropping, then it says something about perceptions and misconceptions even if I'm not sure what. Spuds indeed!"

Of course, the whole true story hinges on the mix up between spuds (colloquial lingo for potatoes) and scuds (the missiles) and just that type of word flow so dear to JD. In the same too brief pages of lucidity he mentions how Nick had sent him a present in hospital. "Nick sent me a dozen red roses to the hospital. The reaction of the nurses is worth comment. First they assumed they were from a woman. Then when I declared they were from a man, looks of puzzlement overcame their faces and the main comment was ummn very nice". JD was also bisexual, a proclivity he enjoyed though never pushing it down your throat as the blurb for a Carry on Miner film would have deployed even though the "ummn" was of the same zing. In a way the dysfunctional household gave off more than a warm welcoming, more of a come and get it if you want it overtone which was never off-putting as casual nakedness and embrace were thrown at you with such sheer affection. Gay scenes at the pit face now lived quite happily alongside the hymn singing now perhaps reconstructed as work song together with the fresh influx of blues and rock.

It was in one of these periods of relative freedom from drink that John wrote his "Story With No Name" about an incidence of creative vandalism at Kiveton Park Colliery which he'd instigated. During the 90s, JD attended a Basic Counselling Course 'swallowing the obligatory PC, especially pro-feminist line ' and for a while it was successful in keeping addiction from the door. But the overall general onslaught was just too great as bit by bit the whole roof caved in to be followed by the increasing nightmare of the man's end.

But then, by the late 1990s, all this was a long time ago as memories of more care-free and assured times became more than clouded over. Terrible expressions of nihilism begin to take over profound in their almost King Lear/Macbeth-like poignancy. Rimbaud, in a Season in Hell, says he played "some fine tricks on madness" but JD's testimony is one so dire that he could no longer do so.

"There is no one to turn to
All the codes become bollocks
From dawn to dusk, nothing.
This prime of nothingness"

" We give up all hope, we lose our appetites for food and the daily round of life. Shrinking into a corner of sadness, life has no joy. Then because we are not eating, our bodies and brains (the same) retreat into malnutrition and so it goes round and around, back and forth, until madness sets in. All hope is lost, all goodness is denied us

proved to be a rebirth, a new world for me, a kibbutz of a community where everybody helped each other out, participating in each others joys and woes. John's parents lived at No. 11. In the next few years it became almost exclusively my world, which I rarely ventured out of except to go to Jessops hospital to give birth to my children. For years up to the 1984/5 strike I'd hardly moved out of Kiveton Park, even to go to Wales – the adjacent village – or other villages close by, never mind a city like Sheffield even though our postcode was a Sheffield one. OK, there was the occasional packed train trip or a week's holiday to Scarborough and Skegness on the Lincolnshire coast, but that was about it. And I had been reasonably content carrying on like this, utterly absorbed in the life of the local community. Here I was "making homes" for myself, and others, like elderly relatives who could no longer cope for themselves. It was nice secretly doing up a poorly aunt's house while she was away somewhere then suddenly revealing it to her and looking at the sheer joy on her face. It was a village creed if you like, something unspoken, always on the look out for others. Like others, I was always working hard – never stopping really. There were plenty of times for laughs though as you'd guffaw hilariously at the wife-swapping antics of the publican and his missus at the Saxon pub etc.

Coming from middle class parents, for a short while, a few miners' wives suspected me of being a shitter and I felt some pressure on myself to prove otherwise. As time went by these responses evaporated and I was completely accepted. I really couldn't be anything other as I had no money and we depended solely on John's wages from the pit. I did go to evening classes at the local high school to learn various practical skills, and if I did learn anything, I immediately passed on my knowledge to other women in the cottages. I remember especially learning how to make corn dollies and showed anybody interested how to do the same. Although corn dollies were fertility symbols they were also the correct farming husbandry for growing healthy wheat. Remember we lived in a rich agricultural area and there was a person in the village who knew about old farming traditions and rituals, their all round significance and how corn dolly men were, until quite recently, buried in the soil in the hope of ensuring a good harvest. She was able to get a class together to ensure the tradition would not be lost. You could also make them into babies' rattles and I still have some corn dollies and I wouldn't part with them for the world. It was a way of keeping something alive of the old witches' traditions.

Although we made a family it wasn't a nuclear family as such, as all of us tended to be in and out of each other's houses. In a way it was a form of looking out for each other without self-consciously appearing to do so. It simply was normal practise like, for instance, on summer evenings when we'd all play cricket with dustbins –mums, dads and kids. People were forever turning up and staying with us too. Our door was always open, our table had always room for one more, and our house, the one to host parties in.

rating with him and his dog on the pit spoil heap. I hardly needed to be asked. That night walking me home John proposed and I accepted.

I never regretted it as the love between us was truly intense, until shattered by the personal hell that ensued after the strike's defeat. My parents though were horrified and refused to accept, let alone attend, our wedding. They even applied to a local court, as you had to be 21 then to get married. Eventually, though, they capitulated but insisted on holding their own reception. Thus JD and I had two separate parties with 2 cakes and 2 quite different sets of guests. My parents refused to speak to John's parents and during the ceremony the vicar chose to talk about "the family" which really was a complete waste of time. Just before the ceremony my mother relented, and a bus of 52 people arrived from York, but until that change of mind we had to pay for our wedding. However by then most things had been catered for. I'd bought a second hand dress for £5 and on the wedding morn I went to nearby Clumber Park to pick my own flowers and tied them with a simple ribbon. I could afford a few things as I was working at the mental hospital and many of the patients came to the ceremony. John's mother baked our wedding cake and all the people in the terraces where they lived enthusiastically joined in. It was so communally organised that one house was for the presents, another for the old folks, one for young folks, one for snogging, one for dancing and music and one for all the all the home made food – even the bread was home-baked. Everybody waved us off for our honeymoon in Scarborough. I kept looking at my wedding and engagement ring, never guessing for one moment that, many years later, I was going to be forced to sell them during the strike to pay an electricity bill.

For a number of years afterwards my parents could hardly bring themselves to speak to me thinking I'd married beneath my status in life. I had, but it wasn't all that unusual. You must remember that in the coalfield areas of Yorkshire the miners kind of held sway, stamping their presence on so many things. They were the foundation of that warm, caring, socially active and conscious egalitarianism the area is famous for as well as its remarkable intelligence, which also imprinted itself everywhere. In short, the miners were really respected, even by those who opposed them. The same was to happen with my parents who, after the initial shock horror, slowly began to sympathise until finally, during 1984/5, they went right behind the miners' strike. Friedrich Engels in his book *The Conditions of the Working class in England* written in 1844, and which had such an influence on Karl Marx, mentions how a deepening historical consciousness in the minds and hearts of working men was proving attractive to ladies of good standing! In Engels' case, as it so happens, it was the other way on, as he remained happily living with his former mill worker girlfriend to the end of his days. Even though it was well over a 100 years later Engels' prescient comment still meant something.

John and I settled in the row of miners' cottages on Park Terrace, just opposite Kiveton Park Colliery, We had held our wedding celebration here. 46, Park Terrace

for we have ceased being of any good. Death in this way is squalid and there is no need it should be so."

JD knew full well where he was heading in his long death throws. All that was left was the whiskey, the pills and the screaming pain getting worse as daily he'd lie in his own diarrhoea more and more losing all sense of himself and even his identity imagining in his illness he'd become all kinds of things and before his electricity was permanently cut-off during the foot and mouth epidemic of 2001, that he'd even got the disease himself.

"Oh no I've got foot and mouth
I'll not be killed, I'll be culled"

It was as though misshapen and disintegrated he could no longer separate himself from other events or sentient beings. He really did feel as though he was one of the slaughtered animals with hoofs in the air, as he became one of his dogs as he'd seen himself as the mugged old lady and even her piece of fish. In his writings truly the madness did set in as reality increasingly overlapped with bizarre fantasy. Although his estranged family constantly stepped in paying this and that bill it was all too much as they had little money themselves and, wringing their hands in exasperation and despair, knowing that handing fivers and tenners over to John meant more for the off-licence.

A stone thrown by a malicious young kid at his living room French window facing the back garden causes JD to go to the window where shortly, seeing a man with a shock of grey hair, he welcomes Merlin and various others from the court of King Arthur. Ushering them in after a brief debate with himself he shows them his arms stash from underneath the stairs of "two brownings, six fragmentation grenades and gas grenades with a stun capacity". Thus a long story, set in early medieval times evolves, peopled with phantom figures from Thor to Robin Hood and Little John together with that perhaps inevitable early Wesleyan experience (so typical of the mining community) of pilgrims and hymns meticulously written out and sung all mixed together in a final, unholy brew. Norse sagas and Norsemen enter together with ancient Greenlanders on psychotropic drugs together with Two Crows (a Native American tribal chief) who meet up With Cromwell's Ironsiders assisted by Hilda, the 6th century AD, first Abbess of Whitby in that dramatic town set on the cliffs of the North Yorks Moors. They set out to save the world or rather together with the "Irish" to destroy everything before them in some medieval pillage and slaughter. In and out of this there are the Mongul hordes together with a Saddam who will finally win against the West. Within this unreadable chaos fragments of JD's mind constantly argue and disagree with other slivers of tissue. Truly a Songs Of Maldoror of dementia and utter disconnection but one from which hardly a profound truth can be garnished

despite the above precis which makes it sound so interesting.

Nonetheless, here and there the crazed tale snaps into an abiding focus. "Buy the world and Destroy all hope. This bloody scum of the universe can only make our lot worse and worse. Curse them. They are shit at the bottom of life's barrel. They speak shit; it's what they look like. It's what they sound like."

"These fuckers who would say this and that

But we must not speak of money goals and god
Are truly beneath contempt.
They are the thieves of words."
"There is no bloody place for me to go crept under
This quilt on this old settee.
OK you bastards you've won today
But believe me cunt faces, I'll have the last word."
"It's no good being dead, just to make you feel good
Stomping in the peasants' blood."
"FUCK OFF"

What more can one say?
Dave W. August 25th 2003

Perhaps I should begin at the beginning....

I was born into a relatively middle class household and moved to Kiveton aged 10. We weren't rich but my parents eventually owned a small furniture shop and they wanted me to make my proper way in the world and were brought up in the family with strong puritanical beliefs like idleness is a sin. Right from being a child I had other ideas, feelings and ways of behaviour and would love staying with an aunty in York, as she had few airs and graces and didn't insist that I had to wear those bodices, which were common for girls, like myself, at the time. As the eldest I was "mother's helper" and taught how to properly run a home where cooking and shopping to budget were taught on a daily basis. This was the image that was presented to the world but behind the façade, for 7 years, I suffered weekly sex abuse by my grandfather that was never dealt with but kept hidden by my middle class parents. Inevitably when I was sixteen and a half I cracked up and spent a long period in the care of Sheffield social services whilst barely a teenager. In time I attended Pond St technical College to study catering. Actually I had already developed quite a knack for cooking. At the age of 14 I'd wag it from school and found work in a transport café by the main road at Woodhouse Mill. I got 10 shillings (50 pence in today's money) making and serving breakfast, dinners plus washing up. I loved it as I learnt many tricks of the trade like frying onions just after the breakfast period which drivers couldn't resist, thus enticing them to buy a full course dinner. I also learnt how to make Yorkshire puddings, scones and buns on a large scale and throw spaghetti at walls and if it stuck you knew it was cooked!

Catering college though was different and I was mixing with girls wearing all the trendy gear coming on stream in the 1960s. However, living in a local social services children's home I was under care orders and I had to wear regulation uniform of yellow gingham dresses with peter pan collars when the others were wearing Mary Quant/Twiggy clothes, like black and white mini-skirts with white boots and so on. It really upset me. I did work experiences in the canteens of big steel works like Steel Peach and Toser and Phoenix and in the holidays was a live-in nanny for the Canon of Sheffield cathedral. This was a real eye opener finding out how the rich lived. I was good at it though, and was even offered a job in Buckingham Palace in London but the Queen (as I was to find she is famous for) only paid pauper's wages so I turned it down.

Age 18 I finally came to say goodbye to the institution and I attended a wedding of a friend in Wales. It was a lively, drunken do and during the shingdig I happened to look under a table and among all the empty bottles and glasses was this guy, hiding under the table and helping himself to any drinks on the table above. He was friendly and had a welcoming smile and we started talking away like there was no tomorrow. The attraction was instant. It was John Dennis and he was a welder and surface worker at Kiveton pit. He wondered what I was doing tomorrow and asked if I'd like to go

to a murderous assault on my psyche and sanity that simply wont ease up. Here am I daily confronting wrecked lives and an often suicidal unhappiness and yet called a misery guts because I am unable to believe in a media/designer mythology of progress and nicey, nicey, lives I am now supposedly sufficiently programmed to want and proclaim. Here I am full of a dark disposition and forebodings yet also full of a yearning for a real joyous, passionate life!

Siding with the strikers wasn't really a choice for me back then in 1984. I just knew I had to get involved and fight like I'd never fought before in my life, to support men like John who had bravely gone out on strike against a brutal, couldn't-give-a-damn Tory government. I also saw it as a fight for the community and not only the immediate interests of my family and the children I was bringing up with as much care, attention and daily love as I could muster. Even at the time, I wondered if this commitment would be readily understood by my children in the years to come, that I was fighting for a better world, not simply abandoning them but trying to make sure that their future foundations and general happiness would be more certain and fulfilling. In the aftermath of defeat and general obliteration it's not easy to keep this simple objective clearly visible in front of me.

For sometime before the strike I had been involved in community issues and had even been voted in as a local Labour party councillor, which nonetheless meant constantly locking horns with a Labour party fiefdom like Rotherham council. In a way we pushed it as far as we could, bending the rules to the point of breaking them, just as long as we could force things more our way. I even became involved in local initiatives like early environmental schemes by helping convert the soil heap of Waleswood pit - closed in the late 1950s - into the basis for Rother Valley Country Park where a semi wilderness of gorse and reed-filled lakes, created from the pit pumping ponds, brought in, over the following years, all sorts of wildlife. But 1984 was different, something bigger and of far greater consequence. I tried to carry on but things rapidly came to a head and I resigned my position as a Labour councillor, overcome with disgust at the antics and collaborationist policies of the Labour party as they danced to the tune of Mrs. Dracula Thatcher.

Almost everybody on strike in the mining community quickly realised this was something out of the ordinary and quite unlike the previous strikes of 1972 and 1974. It was altogether on a different scale and not a strike over wages, like when we broke PM Edward Heath's Tory government's wage restraint policy back in 1972, although it is perhaps permissible to see it as an extension of when we defiantly picked up the gauntlet in response to the question "who governs, the miners or the government?" and went out on strike during the parliamentary elections of 1974. As it was on such a dramatic scale and because of the immediate splits between the non-working and working miners (i.e. scabs) - mainly from the areas to the south of Yorkshire especially Nottinghamshire - the 1984 strike rapidly came to involve one's entire personality and active commitment. It really was a question of to be or not to be.....

Jenny Tells Her Tale



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Our collective defeat

Suddenly, there it was on the pages of the daily Sheffield Stat and local TV and radio: the 20th anniversary of the miners' strike. The memories: 5th of March 1984 Cortonwood pit near Barnsley to close - what immediately became known as "The Alamo" - the point where the miners said enough is enough followed by an immediate wildcat strike throughout Yorkshire and beyond. I just burst into uncontrollable floods of tears. It seemed like yesterday but recollections crashed and collided within me as instant pains in my heart and head became excruciating. The emotion was almost too

much to bear.

Let's go back to that very moment. As a miner's wife we knew a strike was coming and we kind of felt in our bones it was going to be something pretty big, some kind of Rubicon none of us had crossed before in our lives. I remember automatically thinking in a practical way – just what are we going to do; just how are we going to survive with a young family to look after. Cortonwood and immediate survival worries. How much more difficult was it going to be when for years I'd spent so much time trying to balance paying rent and bills – robbing Peter to pay Paul - and the money always petering out before next week's wages were due. Most of the wages were handed over to me but would John, my miner husband, control his drinking? No nights in the pub after the shift etc. Home brew here we go.....

I had already partially prepared for what seemed like the inevitable, managing to get a part time job that would at least bring a little money in even though I well knew it just wouldn't be enough. Though I hadn't worked since the children were born, through an aunty who cleaned in a nearby technical college at Clowne, I fortunately managed to get a five month stand-in, maternity leave job from January to June 1984. It was in the college's refectory where I organised 16,00 meals a day. Then the college closed for the summer and we really were down on our uppers.

And then 20 years later gazing at all the things around me just seemed to redouble my anguish and crying. Such great hopes and 20 years later still experiencing everywhere the desolation of what the state did to us. All around the scars of defeat: the near elimination of the mining community and here I was driving through a landscape – my landscape - where no pit winding gear was anywhere to be seen, except as a half wheel, sculpture-like marker, on the cross roads through Kiveton Park or a few buildings left, like the clockhouse or the pit head baths, because English Heritage had deemed them significant architectural monuments and far more important than discarded miners. Alas, our small community pit villages had become opened up, not to friends, but to new Barrett type estates appearing everywhere, unveiled as “executive suites” where strangers, mostly middle income personnel from all the UK, with no feel for our area's past history moved in. These new dormitory estates and towns redefined the area and were even signposted, along with other place names like Manor Park, on roads out of Sheffield city centre, under the South African name of townships, before some official thought better of it. The point is: once I knew everybody I passed on the way to the local shop, their family history, their parents, grand parents and relatives, now - almost it seemed overnight - you no longer know a lot of the people you pass in the street and it's getting to the point you feel a total alien on your own stomping ground. And then to cap it all now the whole of the Kiveton pit site is in the process of redevelopment and the amazing wildlife that flourished on the spoil heaps and which we all delighted in, has been engulfed by an umbrella group under the dubious name of Yorkshire Forward. Grimly turning my head away I cannot look at the small army

of dumper trucks smoothing everything out for some Design and Build business park. Sure, Yorkshire Forward proclaim their bogus ecological sensitivity when all they are doing is sending nature backwards!

Little did I realise on that fateful day Cortonwood went out on strike, all of this was about to change in a crazily chaotic way never to return to what it once had been, as everyone involved in the strike was about to be thrown into a maelstrom they've never really gotten out of all these years later. If only it could be limited to changes in the urban landscape or to views outside the kitchen window or daily life rituals! No, it was to be much worse. As I thought of the human consequences of this brutal defeat for all of us who had the temerity to take on the state and very nearly win, it was obvious the end result of the strike would be a far more total devastation. And what an aftermath: I personally know of many families that fell apart and disintegrated. And then all the agonies, the alcoholism, heroin, anti-depressants, the many suicides, and the increasing illness both psychological and physical – often at one and the same time – this defeat entailed. Reviving memories of post strike hardship as money dried up as jobs became scarcer, I thought of a family I knew who only a week previously in late February 2004 had finally managed to pay off the debts incurred during the year long uprising. I also knew their particular case was no exception. I thought of the countless, untold sufferings that rained down on the vast majority of miners, fine people who fighting for their community also spoke for others, reaching out to those who wanted the same, faced with the horrible world now beginning to take shape, a world of isolation, loss and pathological behaviour then making its debut on the world stage.

The end of the miners' strike also marked a huge change in the way the state dealt with those it defeated. Previously you could say the state's behaviour was marked by a certain chivalry, particularly in the period of reconstruction following the end of the Second World War. Now it was different. As John would say, now not only did they kick you until you dropped dead but continued to kick and kick and kick. The state would no longer dole out a measure of pious forgiveness, because you had to be damned to eternity, vilified even as you were lowered into the grave. What's more, all memory of what took place had to be obliterated. The strike had to be struck out of recorded history, as if it had never happened, erased even from the subconscious. It seemed a simple job description like “miner” had to be blotted out the dictionary or, if not that, become an equivalent word for “shame”. Just this August, the C4, TV news presenter, Krishnan Guru-Murthy, who likes to flaunt his liberal credentials, had the brazen cheek to refer to our struggle as “the infamous miners' strike”!

Like many another I have had to try and live in this hostile atmosphere, yet how can I do so without real pain? At a safe distance maybe you could say it's paranoia but it's surprising how it did make its way into peoples' heads and remains there. So you began to try and continue your existence in a world where the most important part of your life was a simple figment of an over-worked (and lurid) imagination! It amounts