

Goodbye St Pauls

I achieved thirteen passes at Mock O Level, and then I was hijacked. Literally! A two-pronged approach on my virtuous life occurred.

The first was the arrival of our new neighbours. My childhood Christian friend Peter moved out of next door with his parents, and a very different and glamorous family arrived! The mother was an actress, the father worked for Phillips the record company, and they had a daughter Teresa (named after the Roman Catholic saint) and a young son. Teresa was about my age, and she had won a pony in a newspaper competition, which was so thrilling to me – I had never met anyone who had won anything, let alone a pony. I was still horse-mad, at this point, and could not wait to hear about Lucky the prize pony. We became friends, and I gradually learned about them all. And was introduced to the pop world via all the records that her father brought home, all the “white label” freebies that he was given at work; I was astonished to hear the jazz, blues, and rock artists that were around in the early 60s. I heard the first Bob Dylan album in the house next door; what an extraordinary thrill that was! And her Dad knew all these stars personally...Dusty...Frankie...I was absolutely star-struck at the visitors who would roll up in our little suburban street to pop in next door. It all seemed so glam... but all was not well under the surface; the mum was deeply unhappy at giving up her career, and had taken to drinking rather heavily; and being very superstitious and religious Roman Catholics, decided that the house was haunted and needed exorcising. The quantity of occult books they read probably didn't help, and I was introduced to a very racy selection of devilish novels by Tess, and to the joys of Gin, which I actually loathed the taste of. Evil spirits all around! If only I had loathed the books as well. Horribly fascinating, they were, and I took to reading them surreptitiously in bed at night. They were addictive and very un-Christian. And then I met Lawrence.

I was standing at my bus stop at the Tube station waiting to go home. I had finished my mocks, and was in the hiatus before the O levels, and I was miles away, daydreaming as usual. A voice interrupted my reverie, “Sweetness” it whispered, “Are you a virgin?”. I was shocked to see a face near to mine, dark brown mocking eyes surrounded by a mane of black hair, and a big wide smile. I cannot describe what an effect this person had, except to say that at that moment, although I had never had sex with any man in my life, I knew that I was going to have sex with this one. So I said “No”.!! There was a knowledge then and there that I was going to give myself to someone whose name I did not even know at that point. And so it turned out.

I became friendly, through my friend Tessa next door, with a bunch of teenagers who hung around the Bus Shelter of Southgate Tube Station (an Art Deco masterpiece, a huge circle with the bus stops around one side); and I began to surreptitiously frequent the (forbidden to me) local den of iniquity, the Mayfair Coffee Bar. Tessa went to a nearby secondary modern school, and so was around the locality, getting to know the kids a lot better than I did; I, was the outsider, who simply used to pass through the station on my long commute to and from Hammersmith. She was, as they say, boy crazy, and was a mine of information on the schoolboy talent available. I was soon distracted from the innocence of my pony dreams, and enthralled by her obsession. She was a very attractive girl, with long blonde hair and a pout like Brigitte Bardot, which had the lads drooling. I felt fat and ugly beside this glamour puss, with her celebrity parents; how foolish our self-assessments can be, sometimes! My friend was as insecure as I was, it seemed, and needed Dutch courage to face the world on an ever-increasing basis. Readily available to her, at home.

The boy who had accosted me at the bus stop was a part of the local “gang”, and I became more and more involved with them all; till every weekend and then in the evenings of the school holidays, I was hanging around Southgate. I started going to the local pubs, quite illegally drinking alcohol, and was soon introduced to the joys of “speed”, ephedrine, “purple hearts” and marijuana, which was obtained from Soho on a Friday night by one of the older members of the group. Slowly I eroded my parents' discipline and control, to their distress and despair; I became a “beatnik” in my

own eyes because of the books and articles we all read about such people, and indulged the lifestyle more and more. My moral senses were dulled and dissipated by the Sixties propaganda and the huge fears instilled in us by a media obsessed by the notion that “the Bomb” would drop on us and nuke us to bits any minute. Live for today! Who knows about tomorrow! Free love!! Anything goes! God doesn't exist! Tune in, turn on, drop out! I believed it all – what a sucker!

I continued to be obsessed by Lawrence, and one night he arrived outside my parents' home, and threw stones up to my window. I crept out of the house, and followed him to the local park, where we smoked a joint or two; he then attempted to make love to me – and I was so uptight (literally) that it was a complete failure. He realised at that point that I was still a virgin; somehow he managed to make me feel utterly humiliated, but I just took his sneering abuse – he was there with me, wasn't he? It was enough for me that he noticed me at all; and so began years of my utter besotted attraction to the wretched creature, when I would hang around waiting for his least attentions. By the way, my mother was waiting for me when I got home from our first sexual encounter; she said very little, but took a belt to me, for the only time in my life. We were both weeping, but I was unrepentant inside. What a fool I was!!

My schoolwork began to deteriorate at this point; I was totally unmotivated by academic ambition, and could not wait for the end of day bell to go, when I could race home to be with my new friends. I began to cut classes, and leave school early – scandalous behaviour in those days! When my O Level results came, I had only managed to pass 3 subjects out of 13, and not good marks either; at that point I told my parents, who were at their wits' end by now, that I wanted to leave St. Pauls and go to a local school. They reluctantly gave way to my demands, and I found myself enrolled at a local Girl's High school in nearby Enfield. It was a rude awakening! I had a horrid school uniform to wear, after being used to wearing my own indoor clothes; the school dinners were disgusting, and the staff seemed totally uninspired after my wonderful, motivated teachers. I lasted a few weeks, and then demanded to go to the local Technical College to finish my A levels. That was more like it – I got no work done, but spent all day in the canteen, discussing the bands we would have to play there. I remember Ronnie Wood, of the Birds, very well (the English band, not the *Byrds* from the USA)! He showed me his amplifier in his band's transit van - and that was all ... Who'd have believed where Ronnie is today, 3rd decade in the Rolling Stones and on his third marriage to a girl half his age???? Or where I am, for that matter. At least we're both still alive, thank God!!

My love life, if you want a polite word for it, was varied to say the least. I slept with anyone and everyone I wanted to (thanks to the Pill and it's so called “liberty”); and gained some notoriety in that department, and the “popularity” I craved. Needless to say, I did not have many girl friends, but the boys liked me well enough. At that point, I had discovered that my father, who was a GP, had many free drug samples in his little black bag; I began to steal them to experiment with my friends. How I survived these excesses is quite beyond me, as I look back at the volume and variety of chemicals I ingested. One of my friends was not so lucky – I took a bottle of Morphine tablets and gave them away, and the poor lad overdosed and nearly died. I was so shocked and horrified at the consequences of my “generosity”, that I stopped thieving the pills right away.