

## Chapter II

### Early Life: Birth to Primary School



Grandfather William Howey with baby Diana at East Hepple Farm c. 1941

This could be difficult. I won't recall the very beginning for obvious reasons. As the rest unfolds memory develops. Reliance on photographs and family anecdotes is mandatory. Some things stand out. I believe I can recall watching waves of enemy German bombers returning from raids over Glasgow. They flew in formation at dusk and the endlessly droning sound still resonates. Mother explained this to me on the back porch; or so I think? I can only have been 3 years old at the most. Is this possible? We didn't have TV or go to any movies so they are ruled out as sources.



William Patrick Howey

Diana Howey

1943

Life growing up on the farm in a small rural village or remote hamlet would be viewed by many as idyllic. I know my sister Diana subscribed to this view. I am vaguely aware of a sense of isolation from the rest of the country and even the world. I may be overstating this opinion? Compared with many children from working families we were privileged. In strict order of precedence in caste conscious England we were nearer the bottom. However to be polemical would be churlish. We had access to fishing, ferreting, shooting, hunting with dogs, rabbiting, exploring, tree climbing, riding ponies, swimming in summer, tobogganing in winter, bird nesting in spring, gathering birds' eggs, climbing, go-karting and almost any other outdoor pursuit beloved of small boys.

Collecting conkers (chestnuts), making bows and arrows which worked, stealing apples, playing in the hay stacks, helping on the farm and tree houses were on any agenda. Collecting eggs and feeding chickens were a happy learning experience. Hatching of baby chickens, ducklings and turkeys were a source of wonder. We had to be constrained from providing too much assistance to the premature emergence of the hatchlings by breaking egg shells. Chopping turnips in winter to feed the housed dairy cows was quite fun although requiring a lot of energy. We loved delivering coal with Mr Charlie Beattie around the district in his coal lorry as well as being a nuisance at the garage. It was fun in the carpenters shop to watch Mr Rogerson at work. We looked forward to the many deliveries by butchers, bakers, fishmongers, Dick the Pedlar, clothing outfitters as well as the twice daily postal delivery by bicycle from Thropton. The blacksmith's and farriers forge was a treat at least two days a week; the smells were special. A visit to the Post Office was eagerly anticipated as well as Mrs Beattie's sweet shop. We overdosed once a week on sugar when we had enough coupons.

Most of our activity was outdoors whenever weather permitted; and even when it didn't. There were very good reasons for this. Firstly it was all available out there somewhere. How lucky were we? Also there was no electric light or any other power source. The only cold water running tap was outside. Battery torches were essential especially during the long winter months. Other light sources were kerosene fuelled pressure Tilley Lamps or Hurricane Lamps which were especially designed for out-of-doors even in severe weather. They could be dangerous in tiny young hands however.



Diana & William dressed for action c. 1946

Once a year treats were felling rabbits at the corn (oats) harvesting and the annual threshing of the oats. Hay making and hay carting were fun if we didn't have to work too hard which came later. Sheep clipping (shearing) and dipping were also a once-a-year indulgence with a lot of social activity included. Early education included visits to sheep and cattle marts where we were very easily bored. Dad always availed himself of the opportunity for social extension in the nearest available favourite pub. There were many strategically placed throughout Northumberland! Point-to-point races and local agricultural shows were on any bucket list every year. We had to endure show jumping which my mother loved. The biggest treats were Sunday drives and trips to Sea Houses in summer. An open boat excursion to the sea-bird rich Farne Islands was the apogee. Dad usually managed to fit in his favourite social relaxation. He always knew where and when to find a public house. I think he timed his run to accommodate opening hours?



'The Three Musketeers' of Hepple

William Howey

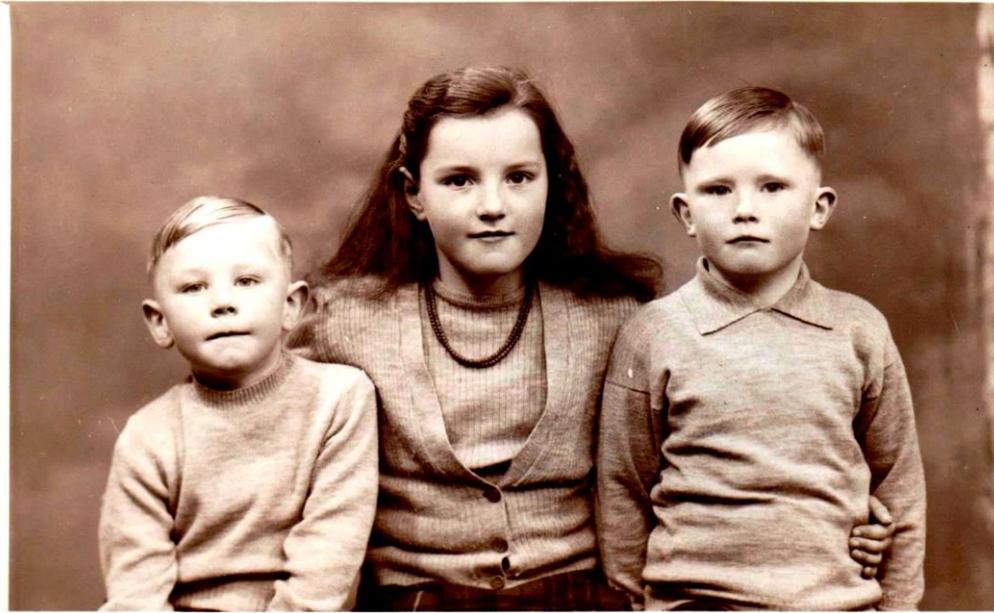
George Rogerson

Thomas Foggon

This photograph was taken by Mr Wilson the Butcher from Rothbury

It is difficult to come up with a negative at this time and distance? It could be for me the increasingly fractured relationship between Mum and Dad? Dad spent a lot of time on social excursions (pubs) and committees which Mum resented. This led to thinly disguised and vocal, even violent domestic rows which I recall with great distaste. Dad could be brutal at times. He had a foul temper. My younger brother Johnny bore the brunt of this. He was less compliant to discipline than either Diana or I. I carried the burden of reflected guilt with me for the rest of my life. I still have nightmares. In this politically correct enlightened new world I believe both my parents might have been culpable of child abuse? I'll leave it there.

I was also terrified in the dark which has lessened only slightly with age. I was too afraid to even pass the churchyard or venture into the farm buildings. I regarded it as weakness and something I should shoulder and overcome. I never ever have. These things in my early memory bank conspired against me in spiralling towards 'darkness visible' during my later life. I deal with this later.



Johnny

Diana

William

This posed portrait was taken in Primrose's Studio Morpeth in c. 1947/1948



Garden at East Hepple

Joy Chesterton

'Tandy'

Mother

Vivienne Walker & Child

I think for mother these were the best of times? It was downhill from here.