

## John Ross

My name is John Ross. I was born on the 3rd May 1943 in 24 Montrose Crescent (I think it's about No. 51 now). I was the youngest of five. My dad, like all the men in the street, worked at the Mary Pit. Next door were the Farmers and across the fence were the Gillespies. Some of the other families were: Webster, Greenhill, Glynn, Ferrier, Nisbet, Young, Hutchison, Wright and Belton. Jimmy Gibson, who went on to box for Scotland, stayed around the corner. The Rougvies stayed across the road and the oldest son Gordon had a son, Doug, who went on to play for Aberdeen during the late 1970s and into the 80s when the Dons were at their best. One of my best friends, Tony Herbert, stayed around the corner in Montrose Cottages.

The house had a bathroom just off the kitchen but we didn't have electricity, just gas. We had a wind up record player and the radio worked off batteries called accumulators which we had to take to the bike shop in Lochleven Road to have them charged.

The street lights were gas and the 'leerie' used to come round and light them as it was getting dark and then come back and put them out at about 9 o'clock.

My dad kept hens in the back garden and one of the family jobs was to feed them. We had this rather fierce cockerel that used to frighten me to death when it was my turn. I swear it used to hide until it saw me coming and then rush me just for the fun. I never did taste chicken until I was about 18 and then it came out of a tin. They had to be sold when we moved to Ballingry.

From our back garden you could see the Mary Pit and over to the 'Meedies'. At the bottom of the garden was the pit railway line and one of our favourite games was to release the wagon's brakes and jump on while they were moving down the slope. We used to climb the trees on the pit road and it was usual to stand at the pit gates and ask if the miners had any 'pit pieces'.

Langlands' sweetie shop was in their front room at the top of Waverley Cottages. I still remember the queues when they had sweeties which were not on ration.

Lochleven Road had three co-op shops, Kelty, DCS and Lochgelly. DCS used to deliver steaming hot fresh made bread every day by horse drawn cart. I can still remember mum leaving it in the front room to cool and I used to get told off for picking bits out of it. Baynes the baker took it over. Lochgelly co-op had this contraption which the workers put the money in and it was sent to the office in the corner. I used to watch this all the time when mum was getting her messages. I got to do it myself in 1960 when I went to work there.

My grannie Murray stayed in 49 Waverley Street. Uncle Jim and Auntie Maggie lived in the front room. Gran had a bed in the living room and my uncle Stevie and my cousin Sonny slept in a bed in the living room recess. There was a huge black range in the living room which heated the room as well as being used for cooking. The kettle was always black from the fire. The scullery had a huge boiler in the middle of the floor which was heated by coal. It had an inside toilet but no bath. Bath night was in a tin bath in front of the range. From her back door there was a path which led up the

hill to the play park. Her house was always full, especially at New Year when it seemed like half the street was there. I still remember gran and old Mrs Rafferty sitting playing dominoes with their snuff and khaki coloured hankies. Lots of cheating went on.

I started at St. Kenneth's in Crosshill at Easter 1948. My first teacher was Miss McGovern, the head was Mr Barnes and the 'jannie' was Johnny O'Hare. My last teacher was Mr Bryce. I loved the place.

We moved to 37 Kirkland Park, Ballingry in January 1949. The first thing that struck me was having electricity, no more gas mantles. My brother Alex and I had a room between us. Our back garden looked out onto fields, the Hill Road and Benarty Hill. The field had wheat and potatoes every other year.

The street was made up of people from Lochore, Crosshill, Glencraig and West of Scotland. Every house had kids so there were always lots of people to play with. Eddie Kelly, Eddie McCulloch and William Bauld were in my class. There was a circle in the bit where I stayed and we used it for races, playing football, rounders and cricket. Mr Mitchell across the road kept pigeons. Our next door neighbours were McCulloch and McKnight. Some of the other families were: Summers, Nailen, Burns, Patterson, Thomson, Neilson, Lawson, Halket, Duffy, Davidson, Feeley, Graham and Lister.

We used to go and play up the avenue past the 'big hoose' to old ruins and we also used to watch for our dads walking up the field from the Mary Pit. We would sometimes walk to the end of the avenue and down the Hill Road. Another of our favourite places was the 'Sparrow Hawk Cliffs' which we would climb. We also crossed over the top of Benarty Hill to Loch Leven and the 'Jackdaw Cliffs' which were a harder climb than the Sparrow Hawks. Sundays during the summer were often spent walking the 3 miles to Loch Leven for a picnic and to play in the water (swim if you were able).

The buses only came as far as Lochore and we had to walk to Crosshill to school. When the buses first came to Ballingry they stopped at the Shank and we used to go to Page's shop for a penny glass of lemonade. Walking home at night was a bit frightening as we had to pass by the graveyard at Ballingry Kirk in the dark.

My first job was in Lochgelly store and I worked in the shop in Martin Crescent when it first opened. It was great as I only had about 200 yards to walk to work.

On Friday nights I would go to 'the ball' in Lochore Institute and at 3 in the morning I'd go across the road to Bayne's and get rolls fresh from the oven. I didn't get much sleep and quite often I'd sleep in for work but my boss Mike Durkin would send somebody to wake me and he had tea and a roll ready for me getting there.

When I think back now it's the people I remember. We didn't have TV (at the coronation in 1953 Mr and Mrs Paterson had the only set and half the street crammed into their living room) so we had to make our own fun. We used to play football against Kirkton Park at the back of the cemetery. The first half ended at dinner time and the second half ended at teatime. We played running games, rounders, tig, hide and seek, cricket and any other game we could think of. Sometimes some of the older people would come out and join in.

I left Kirkland Park when I got married in 1967 but I didn't move too far only to Lochore for a year and then back to Ballingry until I left in 1979. I still haven't moved too far away but the only time I'm in Ballingry now is to attend funerals or to visit mum and dad's grave.

People told us we were poor but it never felt like that as everybody was in the same boat and we made the best of what we had.

I DON'T KNOW IF I MISS THE PLACE BUT I SURE DO MISS THE PEOPLE I WAS BROUGHT UP WITH.