

A FIRST DATE

How it was in the 60's

Looking at old photographs of Wigan, showing Lowes and Woolworths, got me thinking back to the mid 1960's. These were the favourite rendezvous points for courting couples. Do they still use the phrase COURTING these days? I asked my daughters and they had no idea what it meant!

Every Friday and Saturday night, between 7.00 and 7.30 you would see young men and women 'dressed in their finery, waiting for their respective dates. Either in the doorway of 'Lowes Department Store' in the Market Place) or on 'Woolworth's Corner' on the corner of Standishgate and Station Road.



At that time, I was working at John England Mail Order company, which was located in Rylands Mill near the Park.



Which recently has seen many attempts, by the local miscreants to burn it down.

I started as trainee stationery buyer and ended up as the Stationery Buyer. I remember my first day when I was taken to the top floor office by the Personnel manager, when he opened the door I was met by the sight of hundreds of young girls.

As I walked in EVERYONE of them looked at me.... I looked around and thought "How many flights of stairs have I come up I must be in HEAVEN.."

For the last 5 years I had been incarcerated in an all-boys Grammar School and hadn't had all that much contact with the opposite sex en masse, like in a mixed school. I had never seen as many females in one place in my life. As a trainee, the wages weren't fantastic but the views made up for it.. I had landed my ideal job!

One day I noticed a new girl I hadn't seen before, and immediately fell head over heels in love with her. I couldn't take my eyes off her and when she smiled at me, it was like the dance hall scene in West Side Story when Tony first sees Maria across the dance floor, and all around turns into a haze, except for the two of them.



My mate said "You're in there". So, I walked over to her and said

"Hello My name's Ron what's your name?"

She said "Wendy"

"What a beautiful name, and the person to match it" I said, she blushed

"I just wondered, would you like to go the Pictures on Friday night and will you marry me?"

She said "Yes, I would like that very much, thanks for asking me".

Well No... it didn't really happen like that, being rebuffed to your face at that age was embarrassing, humiliating, and like a kick in the "proverbials".

So, I sent my mate to ask her for me.

He said," My mate fancies you and wants to know if you will go out with him on Friday"

She said "why didn't he ask me himself"

My mate said "because he's shy" L.O.L. anyway she said "YES" "O.K".

He said, "he'll meet you at Woolies' corner at 7.30 on Friday"

He returned saying "YOU'RE ON"

All the rest of the week, whenever I saw her my heart jumped and I got butterflies in my stomach. I made a point of walking past her department regularly, (as being the Stationery Buyer I could go where I pleased as I was more or less my own boss.) and whenever I did I heard the other girls on the department say to her "He's here again" and she would look up and smile..

On the Friday I rushed home from work, I had got a 'good wage' that week, as I had worked plenty of overtime Stocktaking and to top it all I had got a date with the 'Girl of my Dreams'...

Ate my tea in 2 minutes, with my mother telling me how "You will get an ulcer eating so quick." Upstairs, bath, shave, cut myself several times, as it was a new blade,



I couldn't find my styptic pencil, so I came down stairs with bits of toilet paper stuck all over my face.



Got my recently ironed white shirt, from the Airing Cupboard, I put it on, making sure the blood had stopped and very carefully removed the bits of toilet paper stuck on my face. Invariably when you remove the last piece it starts to bleed again, and it did, and I got blood on my shirt collar.

Ran upstairs and got another shirt. On with my new 'JUMBO' corduroy jacket, splashed on an ample supply of 'Old Spice' After Shave



Oh! aargh! It doesn't half smart when it touched the cuts.



Put on my suede 'winkle picker' shoes and jacket.

Looked at the time, 7.00 p.m. Got to hurry, I'm meeting the 'GIRL OF MY DREAMS' at 7.30. at Woollies'. Corner.

"Where are you going my mother said?" "Got a Date" I replied "Is she nice?" said my mother, I felt like saying "No she is "far as a clog back", what do you think"

"Be careful" said my dad, my dad's stock phrase, whenever I went on a date. I meant to ask him one day what exactly he meant, but to save him and me any embarrassment I never did so.

I mumbled some inaudible word's in reply and ran to the bus stop... Just to see the bus pulling away from the bus stop.....aarghhh, not to worry there will be another in a couple of minutes. As there was back then.

Got to Woolies Corner with 10 minutes to spare.

Now here we have two scenarios, you wait and wait and at 8.00 o'clock, you realise she ain't coming YOU'VE BEEN STOOD UP!!!! (a phrase I don't think young people know the meaning of these days).

So, with your tail between your legs you catch the bus home. You see a bunch of your mates who say "I thought you had a date?"

"I did, she didn't turn up" met with raucous laughter, to save face you say

"Well I didn't really fancy her anyway" but inside you are as "sick as a pig"

(I can honestly say I have never STOOD A GIRL UP. I think it is one of the most humiliating experiences. I have made dates and then decided I didn't really

want to go but I've always gone).

However, she appeared around the corner, a vision of loveliness. Long dark hair, mini skirt, white knee length boots My heart started beating 20 to the dozen. I said to myself "You've really hit the Jackpot this time Ron boy. Mary Quant eat your heart out" ..."Hi, you look gorgeous" The opening gambit on any date.



"Where do you fancy going, RITZ, COUNTY, COURT???"
 "It's up to you" she replied in a voice like silk. WOW! She looks like a million dollars, and smells devine. Heart beats faster.
 "O.K. we'll go to the Ritz there's a good film on"



Who's bothered what film was on. I couldn't wait to get my arms around this girl.
 I got to the box office "Two circle please." (No stalls for this boy)
 Attendant "Would you like a FILM REVIEW?"



It's the first date, and you're out to impress, "Yes Please" (I ain't afraid to 'Splash the cash') as you go up the first flight of stairs from the Foyer There's the sweet counter.



"Would you like some sweets" (Hey Big Spender...) she says "Oh yes please" if you are really flushed it's a box of BLACK MAGIC



or not so flushed,... Milk Tray



In this particular case it was BLACK MAGIC.

You take your seats in the massive circle.
(For all the old uns. you know what a magnificent cinema the Ritz was.



Looking around for anyone you know. Lights go down Pearl and Dean adverts. Then a cartoon and an information type film.
Interval, Lights go up "Would you like an ice cream?" (Where does this guy get his money from?) "Thank you I'll have a tub please" she says in a voice like an angel..

As you walk down to the ice cream lady,



....you always see at least half a dozen people you know, none of them, with a better looking girl. I hope they see me with this girl... In case they don't, you make a point of showing them where you are sitting, and the girl you are sitting with. Then the main film starts time to put arm around girl. (Heart rate increases, yet again)

After the film finishes. You make a quick exit before the National Anthem starts, and walk her to her bus stop.



Ask her "THE QUESTION"

"Can I see you again?"

Wait for answer with anticipation.

She says "Yes I've really enjoyed this evening, thanks for asking me out"

Heart beats even faster. Make a date for the following week.

A bit of a smooch, and then see her onto her last bus.

As you hear the whistle to announce the departure of all the Last Buses to the various locations around town.

You run like the clappers to catch your last bus, the No.7 ABBEY LAKES.



And you see it disappearing down Wallgate. B*****S. (I often wondered if this was the inspectors only job, to blow the whistle that announces the departure of all the Last Buses and what qualifications you needed, besides having a very accurate watch???)

Never mind the Norley Hall bus leaves from Library St. and has to go down to the bottom, then up King St. I'll catch it at the Station. If you're lucky and run fast you catch it. If not, it's 10/- for a taxi. So, it's a long walk home to Pemberton.

Get home open door as quiet as possible. Everyone is well in bed as its past midnight. Look at yourself in mirror and see the shoulder of your new jacket is covered in face powder. and lipstick on your shirt collar Oh well she was worth it. I've met the girl I'm going to marry.

Sweet Dreams.