

CANDIDA STEVENS GALLERY

Irene Lees
A story for my grandchild

I was born in 1943 in Oldham, Lancashire and lived in a terraced two up and two down house, with my Mum, Dad, Grandad and brother. We had gas lights until 1954 when we eventually had electricity. We were extremely poor, and had an outside Tipler lavatory, no bathroom, flag floors, and extremely damp often with little or no food.

In November 1951 I became very ill with Scarlet Fever, which was at that point in time a highly contagious disease and I had to be isolated. My mother who worked in the Mill had to continue working, leaving me alone in the house in a bed that had been brought downstairs. My only visitor was my favourite Aunty Florrie, who lived next door with my three cousins. Aunty Florrie came in each day at 10.30 after she had returned home from her cleaning job. Whilst she re-kindled the coal fire, she made me a cup of black tea, and she switched on the wireless so that I could listen to Daphne Oxenford, on a programme called Listen With Mother, I loved it. Once the fire had taken hold, Aunty Florrie would get the toasting fork and put a slice of bread on the end and make me a toast and as I was so ill, I just fell asleep until my brother Charles came home from school. Grandad Bunce had had to go and stay with another Aunty until I was better.

I didn't return to school until the September, as I then contracted Rheumatic Fever. When I came out of isolation from Scarlet Fever, the council came and took all the bedding and it was burned. During my illness, the people at the Mill where my Mum worked, clubbed together and bought me a crinoline doll, with a knitted dress, and when you looked under the skirt, there were tiny Christmas crackers. A man in the Merchant Navy who on arriving home from sea, and went drinking with my dad, gave me a cut-out book on the Royal Family which he had purchased in of all places Cape Town for his own children. Mr. Robinson, a neighbour who was really miserable most of the time, killed his prize pigeon trying to tempt me to eat on Christmas Day because we had so little. Christmas Day, was usually, an old sock with a tangerine, a sixpence or shilling two nuts and a mars bar. Me and my brother shared two comic books the Hotspur and the Spurs.

April 2020