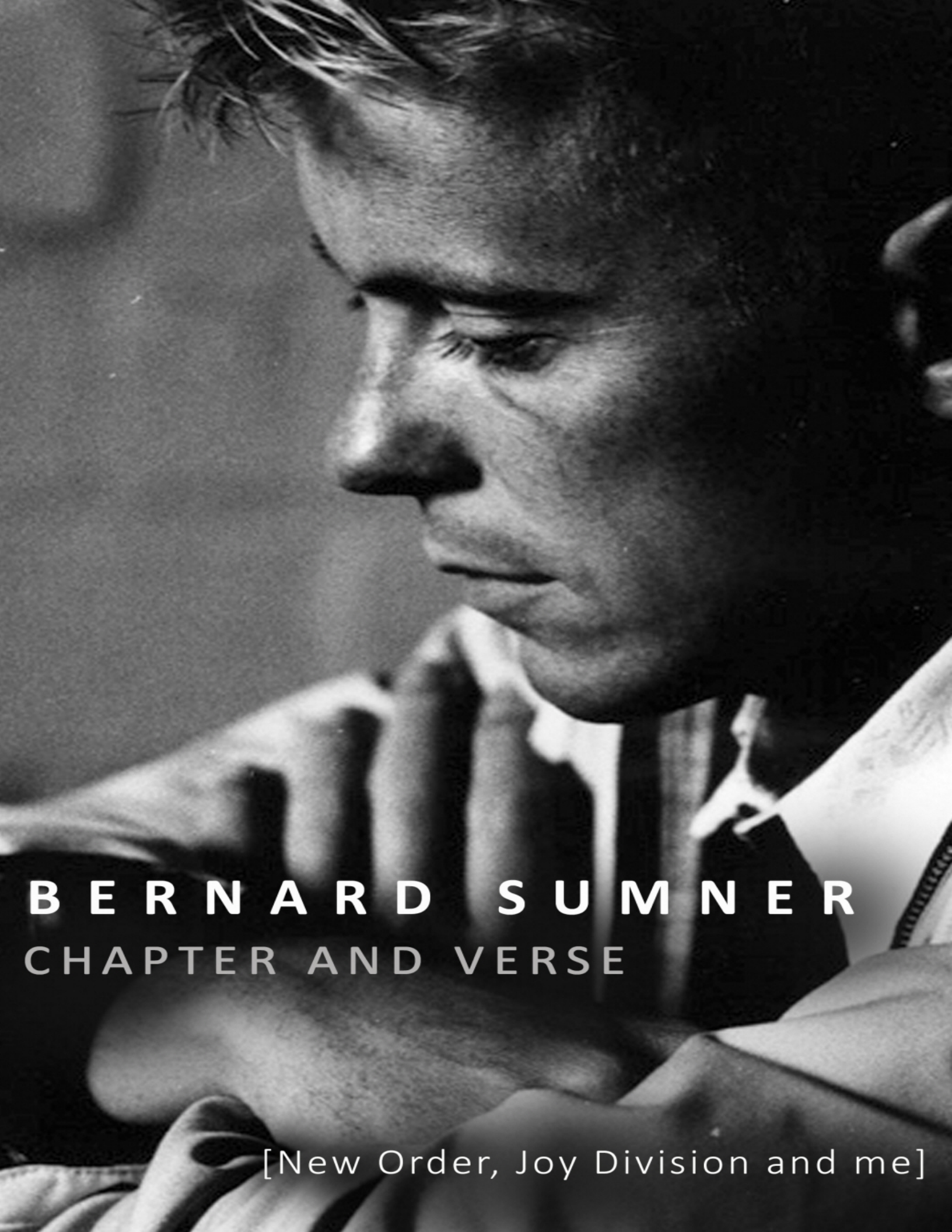




B E R N A R D S U M N E R
CHAPTER AND VERSE

[New Order, Joy Division and me]

About the Book

Founding member and guitarist of Joy Division, lead singer of New Order and an integral part of the Manchester music scene since the late 1970s, Bernard Sumner has over the years been famously reluctant to speak out. Until now... In *Chapter and Verse*, Bernard tells the definitive story behind two of the most influential bands of all time.

The book includes a vivid and illuminating account of Bernard's Salford childhood, the inception and demise of Joy Division, the band's enormous critical and popular success, and the subsequent tragic death of Ian Curtis. Bernard describes the formation of New Order, and takes us behind the scenes at the birth of classics from both bands such as 'Love Will Tear Us Apart', 'Atmosphere', 'Blue Monday' and 'World In Motion'. And he gives his first-hand account of the ecstasy and the agony of the Hacienda days.

Sometimes moving, often hilarious and occasionally out of control, this is a tale populated by some of the most colourful and creative characters in music history, such as Ian Curtis, Tony Wilson, Rob Gretton and Martin Hannett. Some of these events have appeared before in film and book form. But now, for the first time, Bernard Sumner tells the whole story – the Hacienda, Joy Division and New Order – in one book, *Chapter and Verse*.

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and Me

Bernard Sumner

My family
The band
Loyal friends, collaborators
and all those who have passed away
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Time

Time is a curious thing. When you have it before you, it's something you take for granted and it moves slowly. Then, as you get older, it accelerates. When I look back, it seems such a long distance travelled, so long ago, so dream-like.

January 1956 on a cold grey northern winter's day I was born in a Manchester hospital called Crumpsall. I can only imagine what Manchester was like in the fifties: black and white, grainy, weird-looking cars and black vans with austere headlamps and radiator grilles, fog, the Midland Hotel, the Central Library, the River Irwell, the bad food, the rain. So I moved to Salford, five miles away.

I lived at 11 Alfred Street, Lower Broughton, Salford 7, red front door, a terraced house in the middle of a community of mostly decent working-class people. My family consisted of my mother, Laura, my grandmother, Laura, and my grandfather, John, and they were all called Sumner.

Of course, I don't remember much about those so-called formative years, but please see the embarrassing photographs. My earliest memory is of sitting on a brown couch playing with a red and cream plastic guitar that said 'Teen Time' on it.

So that's how it started.

Preface

As I write this, I'm preparing to travel to South America with New Order for gigs in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. We've never particularly promoted ourselves in those countries – in fact, we've never particularly promoted ourselves anywhere outside the UK to any great extent – yet we'll be playing to packed houses in cities about as far in every sense from our Manchester origins as you could possibly imagine.

Joy Division and New Order are international phenomena. Our music has permeated the globe and I'm not sure how or why this has happened: neither group could be described as a conventional pop band churning out hits and earning lots of Top Forty radio airplay. Yet for some reason we've built up a vast and loyal global following that shows no sign of diminishing any time soon, even in the most unlikely settings: only recently, I was at home watching news footage from the Middle East of people running for shelter from a missile attack when a teenage girl ran past the camera wearing an *Unknown Pleasures* T-shirt.

The longevity of the music is something that consistently astounds me. Joy Division started in 1977, and here we are, more than three decades later, as popular as we've ever been, winning over whole new generations and finding new audiences. On our recent tour I asked some fans in their teens how they discovered New Order. Usually their big brother or sister had introduced them to us, or they'd raided their parents' record collections and liked what they heard, which is fantastic to hear.

All this makes these exciting times for New Order. The last few years have proved to be among the busiest and most successful – and in many ways the most enjoyable – in the three-decade history of the band. What began as a couple of charity gigs in 2011 grew into a clutch of festival dates, then, almost before we knew it, we were on a full-blown world tour that lasted several months and covered several continents. Since then it's been more of the same.

The tour re-emphasized for me the very special connection that exists between the fans and the band when it comes to Joy Division and New Order. Everywhere I go I meet a whole range of people, young and old, who approach me with albums to sign and tell me how much our music means to them, how it's been the soundtrack to their lives. Often they ask if they can have a photograph taken: they stand beside me holding out their iPhone to take the picture, and their hand is shaking because they feel so passionate about the music they're struggling to hold the camera still. It's an amazing feeling to think that I've been a part of something that's had that kind of impact on somebody's life, whether they're from the suburbs of Manchester or the suburbs of Lima, Auckland, Tokyo, Berlin or Chicago.

New Order fans are fiercely loyal. They don't just *like* New Order, they feel a profound connection between the band, the music and themselves. It goes way beyond simply liking a catchy tune, it's something deeply personal: it's not just a case of playing our music while they're washing the pots or catching us occasionally on the radio – these are people whose lives have been changed, who've found some kind of solace or inspiration in what we've done.

The main factor in this is of course the music itself: people find something in it that resonates with their own lives on a very profound level, and I've always found it humbling to hear people talking about what our music means to them.

That, however, has always been rather a one-way conversation. Until now.

I am by nature a very private person and have always preferred to let the music speak for me. Over the years, I've given countless interviews about the bands I've been in and the music I've made, but never before have I linked any of it to my personal life. My life in music has been shaped entirely by the person I am and the things that have happened to me. Our music has never been about, for example, being a virtuoso on a particular instrument, it's entirely the product of our personalities and the sum of all our experiences.

Yet while the private aspects of my life have been vital to my creativity, I've always felt very uncomfortable talking about them. I constructed a barrier between the private and public sides of me at an early stage that I have rarely, if ever, opened.

Since we started touring again, however, I've seen the reactions of people to our shows and heard what our music means to them, and it's made me think. I've realized that I owe people a look behind the scenes of my own story, because I don't think anyone can have a true understanding of the music without an insight into where it came from. Life shapes you, and what life does to you shapes your art. It's time for me to fill in the blanks: maybe then people might discern why the music we make affects them so deeply.

I feel that I've reached a point in my life where, if I don't tell my story now, perhaps I never will. There are many things in the pages which follow that I've found difficult to talk about, things I haven't spoken about in public before but which I think are vital to a comprehensive understanding of the person I am, the bands I've played with and the music I've helped to create. My silence regarding anything outside the bands and the music has allowed myths to permeate and untruths to become

accepted as fact, so I hope that, along the way, I can correct a few misperceptions and lay to rest as many of those myths as possible.

For one thing, the truth is a far, far better story.

Chapter One

Streetlights

Los Angeles produced the Beach Boys. Dusseldorf produced Kraftwerk. New York produced Chic. Manchester produced Joy Division.

The Beach Boys' harmonies were full of warmth and sunshine, Kraftwerk's groundbreaking electronic pop was suffused with Germany's post-war economic and technological resurgence while Chic's music thrummed with the joyous hedonism of late seventies New York.

Joy Division sounded like Manchester: cold, sparse and, at times, bleak.

There's a moment from my youth that I think illustrates perfectly where the music of Joy Division came from. It's not even an incident as such, more a snapshot, a mental photograph that I've never forgotten.

I was about sixteen. It was a cold, depressing winter night and I was hanging around with some friends on a street in the Ordsall district of Salford doing nothing in particular, too old and restless to sit around at home, too young to go out drinking. I'm fairly sure Peter Hook was there, and so was another friend called Gresty, but the cold had killed the conversation. There was a thick fog draped over Salford that night, the kind of freezing, cloying fog whose chill penetrates right to the bone. Our breath came in clouds, our shoulders were hunched and our hands thrust deep in our pockets. But what I remember most is looking up the street and seeing how the orange sodium

streetlights had all been given dirty halos by the fog. Making it feel like you had the flu. The lights would have been dingy enough at the best of times, but the fog, grimy with the dirt and grit of industry, had reduced them to a string of murky globules running the length of the street.

The silence was broken by the roar of an engine and a screech of tyres. A car came racing around the corner, the headlights dazzling us for a moment, and in it I could hear a girl screaming her head off. I couldn't see her, I couldn't see anyone in the car, there was just this raw, terrified screaming as it shot off up the road and disappeared into the fog. Silence descended again and I just thought to myself, There's got to be more than this.

When there's no stimulus to be found on the outside, you have no option but to look inside yourself for inspiration, and when I did it set off a creativity that had always been inside me. It mixed with my environment and life experiences to make something tangible, something that expressed me. For some people it's channelled on to a canvas, for others it emerges on to the page, or maybe in sport. In my case, and those of the people with whom I created the sound of Joy Division, it emerged in music. The sound we made was the sound of that night – cold, bleak, industrial – and it came from within.

Manchester was cold and bleak on the day I was born, Wednesday 4 January 1956, in what is now the North Manchester General Hospital in Crumpsall. It was barely a decade after the end of the Second World War and the conflict still loomed large over the country, from the bomb sites that remained in every city and the legacy of post-war austerity – meat rationing had only ended eighteen months before I was born – to the all-too-vivid memories of the generations before mine. The spectre of war had not vanished entirely: the Suez Crisis was brewing and Cold War tensions were higher than ever following the formation of the Warsaw Pact the previous year.

It wasn't all negative, though. There were signs that some things were changing. Even though I have to admit that I'm no big fan of the fifties, Bill Haley's 'Rock Around The Clock', one of the most influential records of the century, was top of the charts on the day I was born, and six days later Elvis would go into the RCA studios in Nashville to record 'Heartbreak Hotel'.

I may have arrived on the cusp of an enormous cultural shift, but mine wasn't the usual kind of birth. My mother, Laura Sumner, had cerebral palsy. She was born absolutely fine but after about three days she started having convulsions that left her with a condition that would confine her to a wheelchair her entire life. She would never walk, would always have great difficulty controlling her movements, and the condition would also affect her speech.

I never knew my father. He'd disappeared from the scene before I was born and I still have no idea who he is. Perhaps strangely, it's never bothered me; I certainly don't believe it's really affected me. I think he's dead now; I've just got that feeling. But even if he was alive I wouldn't have any interest in meeting him. I don't think you miss what you've never had.

Alfred Street was a small cobbled street of Victorian terraced houses not far from Strangeways Prison and close to the River Irwell. Lower Broughton was a typical Salfordian working-class area (the street that inspired Tony Warren to create *Coronation Street* wasn't far away), governed by the needs of industry: Alfred Street and its neighbours provided the labour force for a range of local factories and mills and, within a few minutes' walk, there was a potted version of the entire industrialized north-west: an iron works, copper works, cloth-finishing works, paint factory, chemical works, cotton mill, saw mill and brass foundry. The song 'Dirty Old Town', with its powerful evocation of love in a northern industrial landscape, was

written about Lower Broughton. Living close to Strangeways Prison offered additional sobering insight into the underbelly of life: I remember as a boy once asking my grandfather who the line of men in the weird uniforms digging the road were and he told me they were prisoners on a chain gang detail.

Number eleven was my grandparents' house and, when I was born, my mother was still living with them because she needed so much care. Our house was typical of both the area and the time in most respects: downstairs there was a kitchen, main living room, a parlour that was used for special occasions (although in our house my mother slept there, because she wasn't able to get up the stairs), and an outdoor toilet. We didn't have a bathroom. Upstairs, my bedroom was above the living room, my grandparents' above the parlour. Also upstairs was a small storage room that really gave me the spooks as a child: my granddad had been an air-raid warden during the war and it was packed with gas masks, sandbags, blackout curtains and all sorts of other wartime detritus. I don't know if it was because I'd heard tales of the war and the terrible things that happened, but there was always something frightening about that room. I avoided it.

My grandfather John Sumner, a very knowledgeable and interesting man, was like a father to me. He was Salford born and raised and worked as an engineer at the Vickers factory in Trafford Park. He'd lost his own father when he was ten: my great-grandfather had gone off to the First World War with the Manchester Regiment and been killed at the second Battle of Passchendaele in 1917. My grandmother, Laura, was a very warm, very caring person who came from an old Salford family, the Platts. Her mother, like my mother, was also called Laura: it was a tradition in my family for girls to be named after their mothers, so my grandmother was 'Little Laura' and my great-grandmother was always known as 'Big Laura'.

My granddad had a routine that he'd perform twice a day, once in the morning before leaving for work and once when he returned home in the evening. He'd come through the front door and walk straight through the house exclaiming, 'Ah, fresh air! I need fresh air!', go out into the backyard and take a succession of long, slow, deep breaths. The trouble was, at the end of our street, spewing out noxious fumes was the Wheathill Chemical Works. It was horrible; some days you'd even be told not to go out that day, as they were burning something there. I can almost conjure up the acrid smell today, yet my grandfather would happily breathe it in while extolling the health benefits of inhaling fresh air.

My great-grandmother, Big Laura, lived right opposite the chemical works. She'd had, I think, eight or nine daughters before having a son. Once he'd arrived, she felt she could call it a day. I remember going to visit her when I was very young and seeing my great-grandfather too, a lovely bloke who worked as a wheeltapper on the railways. I remember him being a very warm, kind person, but one day I was told he'd 'gone on a long train journey'. I have very strong memories of him, so he clearly made a big impression on me, yet I recently discovered that I was only about two years old when he died.

After he'd died, my gran used to go and visit my great-grandmother every day, taking her a jug of Guinness from the pub, which she'd sit by the fire and drink – for the iron, she said. It must have worked because, despite living for most of her life opposite a chemical factory that was spewing out all sorts of fumes, she lived to be nearly ninety. Eventually, her house was pulled down and she was moved to the top floor of a fourteen-storey block of flats. I remember visiting her there, looking out at the view from the balcony and thinking, Wow, this is fantastic, you can see for *miles*. All the cars on the streets below looked like Dinky toys and I could see the hills and the countryside

beyond the city: to me as a boy it was magical, but of course for an old woman like my great-grandmother, way up there on the fourteenth floor, a long way from anything, it turned out to be more like a prison.

My Auntie Amy stayed on to look after my great-grandmother. All her siblings had married and she effectively gave up her own life in order to help her. It seems that when she grew too old to marry it dawned on her what she'd missed. In dedicating herself to her mother's welfare, her own life had passed her by, and that realization caused a breakdown that left her in Prestwich mental hospital for the next thirty-two years. Occasionally, Auntie Amy would slip out from the hospital unnoticed and head for our house. When she appeared at the door my mum would send me upstairs, telling me to shut my bedroom door and push the bed behind it. I was to stay there until she told me it was safe to come out. I'd hear Auntie Amy saying that a man was coming round with an axe to kill us all, how she'd come to warn us that we were all going to die. My mum would keep her talking until the police arrived and she'd be taken back to Prestwich. It was heartbreaking. All my other aunts were kind, warm and bubbly, and that's the kind of woman Auntie Amy should have been too.

I had lots of friends on Alfred Street, like Raymond Quinn, David Wroe and Barrie Benson, not to mention more members of my family who lived there as well. I didn't have any brothers or sisters, but my Auntie Doreen lived next door with my cousins David and Stephen and across the road was my Auntie Ruth, who had a daughter, inevitably also called Ruth. My Auntie Ada and Auntie Irene lived on the same street too, with their children, so I had a very sociable childhood. We spent most of our time on the streets. We were always kicking a ball around, hanging out on the corner getting into trouble and wondering what was going on in the other parts of town. What was out there?

While it was a pretty normal working-class Mancunian upbringing in many ways, the thing that set our family apart was my mother's condition. As well as the obvious physical problems she faced, she was also a very angry person. Whether this was because she was frustrated at her disability, maybe even suffered from depression – something that was rarely diagnosed in those days – I don't know for sure, but whatever the cause, her anger was usually focused on me, to the point at times of something close to cruelty.

With my grandparents being such warm, kind people, I was drawn more to them emotionally than I was to my mother, and this may have contributed to her anger. I had lots of friends locally and was no better or worse behaved than anyone else, but I seemed to be on the receiving end of more, and more severe, punishments than anyone I knew.

I was rarely allowed to go out: when the other kids went to the park or the cinema I wouldn't be allowed to go with them. For some reason, even though ours was a close community with plenty of kids my own age who had plenty of people watching out for them, my mother wanted me pretty much where she could see me. I was allowed out into our street and the immediate vicinity, but there were very strict boundaries as to how far I could go. Kids love to roam, and the children round our way were no exception, but while others would go into Manchester or over to Heaton Park, I'd have to stay put, left on a street corner watching the others disappear into the distance in a laughing, noisy rabble.

I hardly ever went against my mother's wishes through sheer fear of what would happen if I did, but one day I did dare to cross the boundaries she'd set for me. I didn't go very far, just a couple of streets away with a gang of kids, but somebody spotted me and word got back to my mother, who went absolutely ballistic as soon as I walked through

the door. I was made to swallow cold, sour tea, leaves and all, until every last drop had gone and then told to stand and face the wall while she told me at length and in no uncertain terms what an awful child I was, something I was made to repeat back to her. I stood there, hands behind my back, nose almost touching the wallpaper, the revolting bitter taste of cold tea still in my mouth and tears running down my face, trying to work out just why she thought I was so terrible. Granted, on this occasion, I had gone against her wishes, probably due to peer pressure more than anything else, but the level of invective being aimed at me as I stood there sobbing against the wall seemed to be about much more than me sneaking quietly out of the front door when nobody was looking. This kind of thing would happen fairly often.

I was far too young to understand at the time of course, but in hindsight I wonder if she was angry at me because my father had disappeared from her life. My mother's circumstances were unusual enough, given her disability, but she was also an unmarried mother, something fairly uncommon in the fifties and sixties. How and why their relationship ended I don't know: my father was never mentioned. Maybe this was one source of her anger at me, that I was the living, breathing legacy of that relationship: I was a permanent reminder of him – maybe I even looked like him. Who knows, perhaps I was kept in because he'd gone out one day and never come back.

When, in the years since, I've tried to work out why she treated me the way she did, it's occurred to me that the horrific Moors Murders might also have had something to do with it. They were going on around that time, so there would have been stories of Manchester kids disappearing. In any case, there were long periods during my childhood where I was kept on an incredibly tight rein. It reared up again when I was older, around sixteen, when my mother didn't want me going to parties and staying out late. When

I was allowed to go I'd have to be home by ten o'clock while my mates would be out till midnight.

Yet, for all I've thought about it, I still don't really know why she treated me that way and I probably never will. To an extent, I kind of understand the way she was with me. She felt trapped by her disability: she was effectively a prisoner in her own body. In that situation, it's perhaps understandable that any wrongdoing by me, perceived or actual, was blown up. Life in the working-class districts of Manchester was tough in those days at the best of times, but my mother was a single parent in a wheelchair and I can only guess at what that did to her state of mind. I remember seeing her trying to walk up the stairs: an image that in itself probably best illustrates my mother's battle with what life had given her. She railed against her condition, doing everything she could to make things more bearable. She tried various homeopathic remedies and we'd regularly have all sorts of quacks calling at the house, but for all her efforts her life remained very difficult and she must have felt extremely frustrated. I suppose she had to take it out on someone. Unfortunately, that person happened to be me.

She wasn't cruel all the time; there were definitely happier times and occasions: I remember we had some wonderful, magical Christmases, for example. But the moment I did something wrong, sometimes even the most trivial thing, she almost seemed to relish the prospect of punishing me for it. It didn't fuck me up or anything, but my childhood was played out over a constant undercurrent of fear of my mother.

In 1961 she married a man called James Dickin, who also suffered from cerebral palsy and wore callipers on his legs. She got him to hit me pretty hard a couple of times. I'm sure it was common back then for fathers to hit their sons and I don't really hold it against him, but it didn't make me any less scared of her. The knowledge that, even though

she couldn't hit me, there was someone in the house who could make sure the fear was always there, even if most of the punishments were psychological rather than physical.

There was one particular occasion when after some misdemeanour or other my mother had sent Jimmy looking for me. I ran upstairs and hid in my bedroom, where there was a tiny cupboard for the gas meter. Being very little at the time, I just about managed to squeeze in and shut the door. I could see through a gap that Jimmy was looking for me and vividly remember the cold fear in my stomach as he scanned the room, searching under the bed, everywhere. I could hear my mother's voice from downstairs, saying, 'Are you sure he's up there? Are you sure he's not gone out?' I can't even remember what happened in the end, whether Jimmy found me or I eventually came out of my own accord to face the music, but the terror of what lay in store for me was so vivid it's stayed with me to this day.

To an extent I understand the way she was with me. I think it was probably borne more out of deep frustration than malice: I guess she felt trapped by her disability, as indeed she was. It was no easier for her than it would be for you or me. My mother wanted better, she *deserved* better, and was angry at the cards life had dealt her. Her situation, and I don't mean just in terms of her disability, would have depressed anyone and defeated many less strong-willed people. She wasn't angry all the time, only when she felt down – I think she may have suffered from depression – and I understand that. After all, anyone in a situation like hers would need a release of some kind and I think for that reason any perceived or actual wrongdoing by me was greatly amplified. I held it against her for many years until I had a period in my life where I suffered from depression and suddenly had an idea of how she must have felt. Life is hard for some people and much harder for others, and when I began to confront and cope with my

depression it opened a door for me just a fraction on what she must have felt like. I forgave her completely.

I was always very conscious of how different she was from other mothers, and I didn't like being marked out from the other kids by having a disabled mother. When you're a child, you don't want to draw attention to yourself, especially with something that could be perceived as a weakness. I wasn't very fair to my mother: I wouldn't even push her down the street in her wheelchair, and it must have bothered her – her own son effectively too ashamed to be seen with her. Lower Broughton was a tough area, and if there was something different about you, something they could get you for, some perceived weakness, you'd be singled out as the weak animal in the herd, and once you were separated from the herd you'd be fighting all the time. Of course, I'd always been taunted – 'Your mum's a spaz', all that stuff – I just didn't want to draw any more attention to it. These days, I'm ashamed I behaved the way I did. Despite my difficult relationship with my mother, I look back at Alfred Street and the times I spent there with a great deal of fondness. I had a tough time at home but, outside the front door, life was very convivial. In summer, on hot days, we kids would be wandering around in our underpants, someone would produce a hosepipe and we'd play in the spray – it was like being on holiday on our own doorsteps. The old people would place chairs outside their houses and sit there in the sun talking to each other. It was such a wonderfully gregarious way of living, the old ladies chatting across the street to each other, looking on happily at the kids running around screaming and shouting, all through the day and right up until midnight. That community spirit was a great thing: you knew the names of everyone in the street, all their foibles – you knew it all. I don't know if they still have that kind of spirit in the few remaining streets like that in Manchester. I wonder if it still happens.

It wasn't all cosy, though: like everywhere else, there were bad families in the area, the ones who'd have the old folk sucking in their cheeks and raising their eyebrows at the latest gossip. There were certain houses you had to be careful of as you walked past – I'll call them the Whites, the Greens and the Pinks, though those aren't their real names, but they were the ones to avoid if you could. They were huge families with loads of kids, with a near-endless supply of brothers and cousins who were really hard, so much so that you'd frequently plan your route so you wouldn't have to go past their houses.

The Pinks in particular were incredible. Half the family was always in prison: I think they had nine kids, and there were always about four in the nick at any given time. I remember walking along the road late one night and hearing a strange hissing noise. I looked over at the Pinks', and there's one of them standing in the living room at the open sash window pissing out into the street. I once saw the Pinks roll out of their front door like a huge human football, a whole bunch of them all screaming and laying into each other. A young couple moved next door to them, which was a bad move. Apparently, there was some kind of altercation in a pub involving this new guy, and he'd glassed one of them, and shortly afterwards I saw one of the Pinks going at him in the street with an iron bar. He hit him so hard the iron bar ended up bent around his chest.

Mrs Pink had a boyfriend. When I was a bit older, we used to hang around the street corner opposite the Pinks' house and, one night, the lights were on and the curtains open and we could see inside. They had sliding doors that divided the parlour from the living room and, as we watched, the doors slid open and there was Mrs Pink in stockings, suspenders and bra, with another woman dressed the same way. Our eyes were on stalks. Then we saw the boyfriend get up out of the armchair, go to the drinks cabinet, pour himself a drink and all three of them

disappeared into the back. They were mad, the Pinks, and they didn't give a fuck about anything.

They didn't bother us much because my cousin Tommy, who lived opposite, was pretty hard himself. Tommy once had a fight with the oldest Pink in which an earlobe got bitten off, and we didn't get any trouble from them after that. I was chased by two older lads once. They were about eighteen or nineteen, and I was only about nine, and they caught up with me and knocked me to the ground. Just as they were about to lay into me I realized they were two of the Pinks, and at the same moment they realized who I was. 'Oh,' one of them said, 'didn't know it was you. All right, leave him.' Thanks, Tommy.

I still occasionally see my aunties and cousins from the street – Irene, Doreen, Steve, David, Lynn, Ruth and Tommy – but not frequently enough, I'm afraid.

Bonfire Night was always a highlight of the year for me. There was a bomb site behind my great-grandmother's house, the legacy of the night a house in the next street had taken a direct hit. People were killed; one of my aunties had been buried in the rubble but was pulled out alive. Although I'd been frightened of my grandfather's store room full of items left over from the war, the bomb site was pretty much the equivalent of our local park, and I loved it. They'd even set up a fairground every so often. In the early seventies it was turned into a proper adventure playground, but for the thirty-odd years after the war it was just a derelict expanse of rubble and scrubland ripe for acting out the fantasies of small boys.

Bonfire Night was the biggest night at the bomb site, and in the weeks leading up to it we used to go round all the houses asking people for any spare wood, then use it to build a huge bonfire with a special den at the top for a watchtower. We needed a watchtower because kids from the neighbouring areas would always come and try to rob our firewood for their own bonfires. A guard would be

posted in the lookout and if any gangs with designs on our stack showed up, he'd summon the gang and there'd be a pitched battle, bricks and rocks flying in all directions. It sounds dangerous, but it was all really good fun. I loved it.

I have to admit we did a bit of stealing, too, things like lead from roofs – and, well, I'm not very proud of that. There was a dodgy scrap metal merchant known locally as No Names No Questions, and all the kids used to pinch things and sell them to him because, as his nickname implied, he wasn't too fussed as to provenance. We'd always be on the lookout for things and when the council started pulling the houses down nearby it opened up a whole new market to us fledgling entrepreneurs. I remember exploring one particular abandoned house and finding an old upright piano in the parlour. This is a terrible thing for a musician to admit, but I took a pair of mole grips and some wire cutters and set about this old piano, spending hours cutting out all the strings – nearly blinding myself several times from whiplash – to take to No Names. When we got to his yard, however, he took one look at our booty and sniffed, 'Sorry, lads, it's only copper plate. I can't give you anything for copper plate.'

At this time I was hanging around with a lad called Barrie Benson who was – and is – a mate of mine. His grandmother lived next door but one to me in Alfred Street and Barrie lived over the back in Victor Street. He was pretty much the cock of the walk in the area but he seemed to like me and for the most part we got on. On one occasion we had our eye on a huge reel of copper telephone wire about an inch thick outside a local electrical contractors. It would, we decided, be worth a fortune. Eventually, the opportunity presented itself and Barrie and I managed to manoeuvre it into a sack and balance it on the saddle of my bike. We were wheeling it through Peel Park feeling pretty pleased with ourselves, when someone must have spotted us and called the police. As we came over the bridge, a

police car screamed to a halt on the other side, sirens going and lights flashing. Thinking quickly, we dumped the bag, I got on the back of the bike and Barrie on the front and we cycled off before they could catch us. Once we were sure the coast was clear we went back to find that the police had just dropped the wire over a fence, so we loaded it back on to the bike and set off again. Keen we may have been, but experts in scrap metal we definitely were not: the dealer didn't want this wire either, so we took it away and burnt it one Bonfire Night. As well as the main bonfire, we had little fires in which we'd bake potatoes to eat while admiring the fireworks and the magnificent blaze we'd spent the previous weeks defending from marauders. That night we cooked our spuds in this burning copper-plated wire, melted plastic and toxic waste dripping on to our dinner. To this day, I suffer a lot from indigestion. So does Barrie, come to think of it.

Another curious trade developed when the council began demolishing houses: people kept discovering old swords hidden behind the fireplaces, apparently left over from the Crimean War. The soldiers, the story went, would return from the fighting and hide their swords and other weapons up the chimney, presumably to keep them out of harm's way. As well as the demolitions, there was a fashion in the sixties for people to knock out original tiled Victorian fireplaces and put in horrible electric fires with glowing plastic coal. When people ripped out the fireplaces they'd often find these swords, sabres, daggers – all sorts of things – hidden away during the wars of the nineteenth century. The kids would collect them, creating a thriving local black market in vintage weaponry. I remember being in the wrong place at the wrong time once and being chased by a gang of kids all waving sabres. It was dangerous stuff but, when you're a kid, you feel as if you're immortal. Some of the things we got up to and the scrapes we got into were

frightening when I look back now, but it was just so much fun we didn't notice any danger.

I think the only truly dangerous thing that happened to me as a kid was going to the dentist. I must have been very young, because I think it was the first time I'd ever been, and it turned out I needed no less than seven fillings. My grandfather used to bring home a bar of chocolate every night – to have chocolate suddenly freely available after the end of rationing must have been amazing for that generation, so my grandfather would buy a lot of it – and I'd help him demolish it, along with, it seemed, most of my tooth enamel. I didn't really know what a filling was, so I had no apprehension about what lay in store and went in quite happily. I was almost looking forward to it. They gave me gas and knocked me out and the next thing I remember is waking up with the dentist and his assistant holding me upside down with my head in a big sink, slapping me hard in the face and running cold water over me. When I looked down I could see blood washing down the plughole. I started shouting, demanding to know what was going on, and they said that I'd started screaming and they couldn't get me to stop. Something must have gone dreadfully wrong, because they both looked pale and very panicked. Once I'd recovered a little bit, the dentist drove me home – I remember he had an E-type Jaguar – but for the next few days I was very poorly, with blood constantly seeping from my mouth. I think they must have given me too much gas or got the mixture wrong, and they'd nearly lost me.

By this time I was a pupil at St Clement's Primary School, which was only a short walk from where we lived but still far enough for me to be late most days. I'm one of those people who just seems to be late for everything. I remember one of my teachers telling me, 'Bernard Sumner, you'll be late for your own funeral.' I didn't do particularly well in my school career and I think the way I was taught at primary level is largely responsible for that. I wasn't good

at maths, for example, and the way of educating you if you weren't very good at a subject back then was to make you stand on a chair and bombard you with questions or demands to recite your nine times table or somesuch. When you didn't get it right the teachers would deliberately make a fool of you in front of the class. As academic motivation goes, it was a pretty bizarre philosophy. Primary school was a pretty horrible experience, one that set about destroying from a very early age any self-confidence I might have had. It was education through fear, but it didn't toughen me up, it didn't make me learn, it just made me more and more anxious and created a self-perpetuating downward spiral from which I'd never really recover. At least, not during my school years.

There are only two things I can say for my time at St Clement's: I learned to read, and I loved anything to do with art, especially clay modelling. The school had its own kiln and I was never happier than when I was making things. We had a teacher called Mr Strapps who taught us how to work with clay but, instead of a potter's wheel, he used a record player. It was sculpture at 45rpm – unconventional, certainly, but it worked for me.

The downside was that Mr Strapps was an absolutely terrifying man. His name alone sounds like something out of Dickens and he could certainly have stepped straight out of the pages of *Hard Times*. He taught the eldest year at primary school, so you grew up with this dread of the inevitability of Mr Strapps becoming your class tutor. He caned me once: it was raining at playtime and we were all kept inside and I knocked over a bottle of milk. Even though it was clearly an accident, he called me straight to the front of the classroom and thrashed me on the hand as hard as he could with his cane.

My abiding memory of Mr Strapps isn't being caned, however. It's something far crueller.

It was another rainy breaktime, so we were all inside trying to amuse ourselves as best we could. I'd picked out a book of poetry from the school library and was sitting there quietly reading when I sensed Mr Strapps walk up behind me. He looked over my shoulder and when he saw what I was reading, he said, almost in a growl, oozing contempt, 'What are you doing reading that?' I looked up from the book and said, 'What do you mean, Mr Strapps?' He put his hands behind his back, bent down so his mouth was next to my ear and sneered, 'Listen, where you come from, you're just going to end up working in a factory, so there's no point in reading anything like that. Just put it back. Now.'

I'd been brought up by my mother and grandparents to respect authority. He's Mr Strapps, I thought, he's my teacher, so he must know what he's talking about. So I did put the book back and I did stop reading. What a terrible thing for anyone to say to a kid, let alone a teacher.

Despite the efforts of Mr Strapps, remarkably, I did manage to pass my Eleven Plus. I'd been promised a new bike by my grandfather as an incentive, but I think the main reason I passed was fear, and not of Mr Strapps for once. There were two school options beyond the Eleven Plus: if you passed you went to Salford Grammar School and if you failed you were sent to Lower Broughton Modern. One of my cousins had warned me how hard it was at Lower Broughton: if you went there, he told me, you got the shit beaten out of you every week for the entire first year without fail. In reality, it was probably no worse than my primary school, where we had our share of kids from hard families, but my jaw dropped and I was determined not to end up at Lower Broughton Modern. So I studied like mad and went into the exams praying that I'd pass. I missed one part of the exams because I had measles, and when I'd recovered I had to go in on my own, sit in a freezing cold classroom while all my mates were out playing and do the exam I'd missed. There were a few