



RICHARD ROSE

Not Strictly  
*Dancing*

novum

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# Imprint

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# Citation

**“If you hit a wall, climb over it,  
crawl under it or dance on top of it”**

**Unknown**

**“And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,  
they danced by the light of the moon”**

**Edward Lear**

**“Let us read and let us dance; these two amusements  
will never do any harm to the world”**

**Voltaire**

**“The only way to make sense out of change is to  
plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance”**

**Alan Wilson Watts**

# Dedication

**My true soulmate, Simon Pearson,  
has been of great support and encouragement  
with constructive criticism  
from the start, my very own “first reader”.**

# Prologue

Ray was was born at home, Antrobus Road, Handsworth, Birmingham on Saturday January 31<sup>st</sup> 1948, the last family member to join Kate, Terry and parents Ellen and Thomas. The unusual age gaps between brothers and sister doomed them never to be close, as at the time of Ray's birth Kate was nearly 7 and Terry almost 16. It wasn't too long before some resentment would show its jealous face, Kate ranting at her mother by the time Ray was two or three, accusing Ellen of favouritism towards him.

Terry didn't notice; he was working by now, coming out of his apprenticeship in the Jewellery Quarter as Diesinker/Toolmaker, following in Father's footsteps, although Thomas was of the highest experienced toolmaking material in precision engineering, which would unexpectedly take him to a far-off land on two ground-breaking work endeavours.

With his eighteenth birthday approaching, Terry was out most evenings with mates chasing girls around the Tower Ballroom.

At this time, Ellen was having difficulties with Kate, who had become a difficult teenager at age ten! Instead of parenting the all-too-many flare-ups, Ellen would argue and screech as much as Kate. Often Thomas would arrive home from work and have to separate them; out of chaos he seemed to achieve calm.

Ray, the opposite temperament to his sister, would enjoy his pre-school days in the company of his mother. Ellen was not the conventional parent; she hated domesticity and craved an escape to a glamorous world, however fleetingly.

Ray would experience much unrest in his family over the years and form an inseparable bond with his father,

whether his work took him away for long periods of time or not. He also felt closeness to his aunts: Agnes, Rose, and Dolly.

Dorothy Carless, Ray's first dance teacher, not only made a dramatic impact in his formative years but paved the way for dance that would take him around the world.



# 1

With Kate at school and Terry at work, all Ellen's days were spent with Ray, who at age nearly-four was becoming a keen observer of the grown-up world and enjoyed being taken out every day. Ellen couldn't stand being in the house a moment longer than it took her to get ready to go out; domesticity was definitely not her style.

Days when there was more money to spend it would be a bus into town, lunch in Joe Lyon's Corner House, and a Cinema matinée. Ray loved these sorts of days, and in later years would become an avid film fan, particularly from this era.

At times when Ellen had very little money to spend, she would take Ray on a bus trip. At the junction of Antrobus Road and Rookery Road they could catch the number eleven Outer Circle route anti clockwise. The bus would chug along through the many suburbs of Birmingham, visiting the outskirts, collecting new passengers, and dropping off others at the many designated stops. This whole circuit route was twenty-six miles and the journey took well over two hours if you got off where you got on - and all for sixpence!

Ray and Ellen always sat on the top deck at the back with Ray in the window seat; Ellen told him that they got a longer ride that way. After the trip it would be tea and cakes at a local café before food shopping on the way home. Dinner was not a family meal get together; Ellen seemed to make hard work of this, feeding everyone separately as they came home. Organised she was not.

Days when there was just about a bus fare possible, Ray would be in tow with Ellen visiting friends or sisters, of which she had four. These visits entailed Ray listening to

adult conversation with an occasional pause to enquire whether Ray wanted anything. He was quite content, enjoying the education of it all, taking everything in and would entertain many in later years of his life with amusing tales of his mother. Shopping was one of these; how she would ask for purchases in the grocer's shop, getting all the product names wrong - "Typhoid Tea", "Ambrose Rice", "Coronation Milk" etc. The bemused assistants interpreting Ellen's requests were always too polite to correct her. The customer was always right back then, no self-service.

One of many visits was to Ray's Aunt Sue, Ellen's elder sister, who had two daughters, Jean and Susan, and was married to Frank Goucher. Ray and Susan were close in age and got on really well. This continued throughout their lives.

The first day of school for Ray, Tuesday September 4<sup>th</sup> 1952, came as a big shock, realising a drastic change to daily life and the first time he would be parted from Ellen; he wouldn't be five until the next January.

The previous Saturday had been quite exciting, as Thomas and Ellen took Ray to "Wralls Outfitters" on Soho Road, a buzzy busy shopping street, which locals always referred to as "The Main Road". Going shopping with both Mum and Dad was a rarity, thus adding to the treat; they made a fine looking couple, with Ellen's striking demeanour and Thomas's "James Stewart" looks seeming to mimic the way the American movie star dressed and moved, but this belied their true relationship.

Wralls specialised in school uniforms for boys and dominated, in rather grand style, one of the best locations on this thoroughfare. When approaching the main entrance, a uniformed commissionaire opened the large glass door, welcoming customers inside. Ray enjoyed all the attention on hand, and in particular the jolly little man with a bald head who seemed to know Ray's sizes by just looking at him. Sometime later Ray, escorted by Thomas and Ellen,

left the store piled with parcels. Ray was now the proud owner of two pairs grey flannel short trousers, two white shirts, a striped two-tone blue tie on elastic that went over the head and finally tucked under the shirt collar, as well as shiny new black shoes and several pairs of grey socks. The crowning glory was the navy blue blazer, complete with badge sewn on the breast pocket showing two letters intertwined - "RR", standing for Rookery Road School, uncannily also Ray's initials. A dress rehearsal at home proved just right, with Ray's platinum blonde bob topping the bill.

Day one trauma over, Ray was overjoyed to see Ellen at the school gate when classes were dismissed for the day. However, that would be the one and only time that Ellen would take him to or fetch him from school. From day two Ray was on his own, leaving home in the mornings to walk through the gullies, narrow higgledy-piggledy tracks starting between houses on the opposite side of the road, widening to a tarmac path, and finally a narrow road to end the fifteen-minute walk (if he didn't dawdle), arriving at the junction of Rookery Road, where the school was situated on the right corner whilst the tuck shop was on the left and the Rookery Cinema opposite.

A pattern quickly formed, and Ray soon realised that his Mum was not around when he came out of school. Nigel Paignton from along the road had started on the same day as Ray, and his doting mother Hilda was always first at the school gate. Surprised that Ray was not being met she insisted that she and Nigel would walk Ray home before continuing down the road to their house. Ellen always left the back gate open and jam sandwiches on Ray's tricycle saddle in the backyard shed. Regardless of the weather, there was no access to the house until someone came home with a key. Presumably, Ellen expected Kate to get home from her school at more or less the same time as Ray, but Kate had lots of mates and was not up for babysitting

younger brother until Mother decided to walk through the door. Definitely not, thanks very much! Ray was the original “latch-key kid”.

Next door at 53 lived the “Ing” family, next to them at 55 Mr and Mrs Poppy, before getting to the corner shop owned by Mr and Mrs Lawrence, who were secretly known by their customers as “Mop and Bucket.” Mr Lawrence was very tall and thin, while Mrs Lawrence was very short and fat, looking like a squashed angry owl wearing national health glasses; she always looked as though she’d been sucking a bag of lemons.

Coincidence, not intention, brought Aggie Ing, Thomas’s half-sister, and husband Bill to live next door. They’d never mixed much, and Ellen and Aggie just didn’t like each other, full stop. By comparison to Ellen’s glamorous countenance, long blonde hair, hourglass figure and legs likened to Betty Grable, Aggie was the total opposite; more Peggy Mount.

Ray loved his Auntie Agg, much to the amazement of the rest of his family. It was easy to see how their relationship developed. Aggie was the stay-at-home housewife drudging every day for Bill, who never seemed to speak to her, although he must have said something at least three times in their marriage as they had three children; Irene, Ronnie and Dennis.

Aggie would hear Ray open the back gate at the end of the shared entry between the two houses each afternoon and would call him in and give him tea and biscuits, or pastries on her baking days, which didn’t happen in Ray’s house.

One day, when Ellen tottered along the entry in her high heels, preparing to open the gate, she was taken aback by Aggie’s confrontation; she gave her a piece of her mind, criticising Ellen for never being there when Ray came home from school, “ought to be ashamed of yourself,” etc. Ellen’s counterattack, telling Aggie to mind her own