

MILTON SENIOR – UPPER SIXTH FORM – PART ONE

I entered the Upper Sixth Form with changed expectations. Uppermost in my mind was that it was my last year in school, and university lay just ahead. The teachers treated us like adults, with the lessons seeming more like discussions than lectures. Smaller classes and an unfamiliar AEB curriculum would have contributed to that feeling. I enjoyed my schooldays, particularly the Sixth Form, but the entire year felt like a farewell.

In the Lower Sixth Form we needed to study four subjects, but in the Upper Sixth we could drop one. The entire class dropped accounting, which had proved to be the driest of dry subjects. That left us with economics, economic geography, and economic history.

Halfway through the year, during the South African university holidays, six students from the previous year's Upper Sixth visited the school to see Reg Cowper, the master in charge. Full of cheer, two of them sported beards and moustaches, reminding us of what lay just around the corner, building our sense of anticipation.

Before the Sixth Form, a variety of sports dominated my afternoons, and I'd taken part in almost all that the school offered. But by now, I'd reduced my activities to tennis and the occasional game of cricket.

Outside interests were taking precedence, fuelled by popular music. I'd sit at my desk by the bedroom window, looking down Selborne Avenue, doing my homework while listening to Cliff and The Shadows, Fats Domino, The Platters, and many others, dreaming of what the future might hold.

On Friday and Saturday nights, Stewart and I would be on the lookout for a rock session somewhere in town. This led us to discover several unfamiliar halls and venues, and several colourful characters. Stewart's favourite band was Mike Shannon and The Diamonds, while I liked The Stereos.

One evening we went to a hall in North End where Mike Shannon and The Diamonds were playing. The throbbing rhythm of guitars guided us to the hall with its dimmed lighting and smoky atmosphere. During a break in the music, we stepped outside for fresh air and saw a group of boys standing at the side of the hall, laughing. A young girl, most likely drunk, kept appearing at the window, shouting obscenities at the boys and enjoying their reactions.

In the second term, when our first rugby fifteen played at home, we'd often go to the school on a chilly winter Saturday afternoon, offering our support from the sidelines with the Milton war cry. I don't remember the whole thing other than the words 'Gugliaye, Gugliayo,' which may be the wrong spelling.

The major excitement of the year was the Cuban Missile Crisis. The prospect of a showdown between the USA and the USSR transfixed us. We all sat by our radios, waiting for the latest news, but then the Russians backed down, with JFK's reputation redeemed following the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

In the third term, about a month before our study leave, the much-anticipated Milton School Leavers' Dance was coming up. It was a big event in the Bulawayo calendar, held in the Milton School Hall each year. I'd long promised my cousin Jean that I'd take her, but in the meantime, I'd met Susan, whom I was then dating. The dilemma soon resolved, with both

girls amenable to sharing the occasion with me. The grand event's live band and the slippery wooden strip flooring proved ideal for dancing. I could have danced all night, and I did.

Now our focus returned to work. The year progressed with the AEB A-level exams approaching and a heightened sense of our pending departure from high school. Economic geography became my forte despite my difficult relationship with the teacher since Form One. Every Friday of the last term, we'd have a test set under exam-like conditions. I came first in class in every economic geography test bar one, when I came second. Our teacher commented not once.

In the last week of class, just before our fortnight's study leave, our economic geography teacher was preparing our school reports when he left the room for a short time. Stewart hurried up to his desk and read out the comments he'd written for each of us. Almost all got favourable comments, but to everyone's amusement, mine read, 'Could try harder.' Somehow, I got more favourable comments from the teachers in my other, less successful subjects. Clearly, politics was alive and well in school life.