

# Young Roses

*(From Teenage Funkland)*

It's funny how something just triggers off yer memory. There I was down a pub in London, sipping my stupidly expensive beer, chattin to some fellow Clarets (fans of Burnley Football Club). Earlier that day the boys had earned a draw in the FA Cup 5th round at Loftus Road against Fulham. We had come down the day previously to attend the Peace march, where 2 million people had defied George Bush & Tony Blair's warmongering with a show of civic solidarity not seen since the early nineties. Then from the duke-box came the Hendrixian crunch of John Squires guitar... followed a few moments later by;

*Love spreads her arms,  
Waits there for the nails...*

And then it all came flooding back... the Clarets in London, massive crowds, the Roses... 1994! On returning to Lancashire I called in on Nick. Nine years ago (had it been so long) we had shared a summer of such coolness that I wonder why I've never written about it before. While playing a round of golf we reminisced on those heady days & it all came floodin back to us. Now, at twenty-six we seemed positively ancient. It seemed a long time since those sweet, ebullient days... my first beers at 14, my first lay at 15, my first rave at 17... it was a time when everything was exiting & life was filled with promise. Almost a decade had passed since then, that's a tenth of a century, but the spirit of those times still lingers on. As we fired our balls across the greenery of Towneley golf course, we realised our adventure was a classic taylor, a story worth writing about. Luckily I am a bit of a writer myself, & thus a book was born. By the way, for anyone interested I clubbed my way to an incredible 141... on a shot-per-pounds ratio great value for money.

Ah 1994, I remember it well... resin was £15 an eighth, pills a tenner in the clubs, acid £2.50 a tab, speed £7.50 a gram & skunk weed £25 on yer eighth. It was the year when Robert A. Lopez of Westport, NY State experimented with obtaining ear mites from cats & inserting them in his own ear, carefully observing and analyzing the results. It was the year when Barbara Windsor joined the cast of Eastenders, taking over the Queen Vic as Peggy Mitchell, mother of the bald-pated Mitchell brothers. It was the year that both the Spice girls & the National Lottery were born. It was the year when the Japanese Meteorological Society concluded their seven-year research on whether Catfish caused earthquakes by wigglin their tails. It was also the year of the greatest catastrophe to hit the British Isles... the Channel Tunnel was opened. Now, we were connected to France with an erroneous & tangible link, something we had deftly avoided for many a millennia (trust the Tories).

On the telly you had your usual fare. In the morning GMTV vied with the Big Breakfast to set up the viewers day (never saw them myself, far too early). In the land of the soap opera it was Neighbours & Home & Away at tea-time (or twice a day for doleys & students), followed by Corrie & 'Stenders. The Crystal maze was still on as was Play yer Cards Right with Bruce Forsyth & his sexy birds. Have I got News For You catered for the bankers, while Frank Skinner & David Baddiel entertained the footy fans with their Fantasy Football League! In comedy Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced bouquet) made all the pensioners laugh & a certain fat, mouthy lesbian bird called Jo Brand amused everybody else. Alan Partridge gave us Knowing me, Knowing You & the Fast Show had us in stitches. The Yanks gave us Roseanne at her peak, the stony huh-huh-huh's of Beavis & Butthead, & finally, the Simpsons. While BBC2 showed us repeats of the first series, Sky One kept us up to date with the adventures of Homer, Bart, Marge & Lisa... god bless America!

In the celluloid realm of the movie, dem dere Yanks seemed to be havin a good day. With *Raiders of the Lost Ark* Steven Spielberg had apparently made the greatest film ever, but he called my opinion into question when he gave the world his *Schindlers List*. A haunting, emotional & yet very entertaining portrayal of the Jewish Holocaust, he brought that heinous crime to life in a masterpiece of cinematic experience & history. His decision to make it in Black & White only added to the atmosphere, excepting one sublime moment. After seeing a little girl wearing a scarlet coat during an urban clearance by the Nazis, we would come across that same coat later in the film... only in a cart full of bodies being hauled through the death camps. Other films included the *Shawshank Redemption*, released to a tidal wave of apathy, soon to become

recognized as one of the great movies of all time... & Quentin Tarantino's follow up to the startling & curiously unsettling *Reservoir Dogs*... *Pulp Fiction*! In it John Travolta became cool again, Uma Thurman was fit as fuck, dancin away til she overdosed on coke, leadin to a wicked scene. Near comatose she was given a direct shot of adrenalin through the breast-plate & into her heart... she sat up with the fuckin needle stickin out of her chest... cool! I leave you with a memory of one particular scene. Bruce Willis walked in on his boss being botteyed by a copper called Zed & his rubber-clad gimp... evidence enough to prove that the Yanks are definitely WRONG! Nearer to home Britain produced the interminably silly *Four Weddings & a Funeral*, where once again Hugh Grant played a slightly embarrassed, yet vaguely cool Englishman trying to get laid. The film was wank but it established Mr Grant, who, like a wank, I'm glad to say has got better with age.

In 1994 the nineties at last began to express themselves. Being able to draw on the sixties's for it's music, the seventies for it's fashion & the eighties for not what to do (man learns from his mistakes) suddenly the age had projected a persona... nothing particularly new, but a subtle blend of all the cool bits that had gone on before. There was definitely something in the air, a sense of escape from the shackles of the eighties... to be poor was cool, all the yuppies now holed up in Surbiton. From the many tribes came the many vibes, it wasn't just Mods & Rockers anymore, the fashion industry fragmenting & it seemed that now, as long as you had *a* style you were cool. Look at Jarvis Cocker... a tall, gangly, thirtysomething, bespectacled geek was now an urban hero. The people were taking to the streets once again, more peaceably than the Poll Tax riots, their agendas more for Gay Pride & against the cutting down of student grants.

In music, thanks to the efforts of the first generation of swaggering bands, the Madchester set, new outfits had a new 'feel' to draw on, interpreting it in their own ways. Yet, with the Roses in hiding, the Monday's on crack & James past their peak, there came no new band to get us grooving. Suede shone ephemeral for a while, their first album still possesses a classical guitar swirl. Unfortunately we had to turn to the Yanks for kicks. Based in Seattle the 'grunge' sound rocketed round the world, those long haircuts, leaving a trail of long hair & dodgy t-shirts in it's wake. When Nirvana released *Nevermind* they were suddenly thrust to the forefront of alternative music, & were pretty damn good. With the recent release of The Doors movie, a huge amount of interest was created for those four LA rockers & sales of their fine back catalogue outsold many a British band.

But on April 7th, Kurt Cobain blew his brains out with a shotgun. He'd tried an overdose in Rome earlier that year, but failed. To the world he was the iconic figurehead of grunge, clad in a Freddy Krueger jumper & wielding his gee-tah like a Celtic axeman. Heroin addiction, a dark temperament & being married to Courtney Love probably tipped him over the edge & the only question should be how come it took him so long to do it... the working title of Nirvana's album *In Utero* was '*I hate myself & want to die.*' It's a shame, cos the guy had somethin to say & a way of sayin that made yer wanna hear. Those who had tickets to his England gigs were absolutely gutted & just a few days later on the 11th, after the candlelit vigils & copycat suicides, Oasis released *Supersonic*, that laid-back & positively cool piece of Mancunian testosterone...

So 1994 Britpop burst all about our earlobes. How many a pissed up boogie has been had with each of the purveyors of mid nineties rock 'n' roll. Although, *Gone* was all the electro pop nonsense, that made the eighties an instantly forgettable decade. Despite *Take That* still topping the charts gone were the dodgy haircuts, clothes & tunes of the Stock, Aitken & waterman brigade & in was a large helping of cool! A series of definitive albums were released throughout the year... the retro-rock of *Definitely Maybe* (Live forever, Cuggarettes & Alcohol), Blur's new-Mod album *Parklife* (End of a century) & Pulp's glitzy, disco-intellectual *His'n'Hers* (babies, do you remember the first time). Oxford trio Supergrass released their honky-tonk *I should coco*, whose piano-driven tune *Allright* became the anthem of the summer. Dodgy released their deliciously optimistic album *Homegrown* (stayin out for the summer, so let me go far) & Beck gave the world his *Mellow Gold*, whose *Loser* must be the most famous chorus in the world where nobody knows what they are actually singing. Radiohead released their *My Iron Lung E.P.*, hinting at what was to come in throughout mid-nineties epoch. Ride's carnival of *Light* looked after the Shoe-gazers, while Prodigy catered for the ravers. Their *Jilted Generation* (*Poison*) was played everywhere & I'll never forget seeing them play at Newcastle's Mayfair club, late '94, a flame-haired Liam rolling onto stage in a see-thro sphere, ripping his way through the clear plastic to begin the first tune.

So, where were you in Spring '94... Some were at university, some in the armed forces. Some had crap jobs, some had good jobs, some were on the Dole. Some were in prison & some were pregnant. Some were in hospital while others were abroad. All in all, everyone was doing *something* & was *somewhere*. Me? I was dossing about in Burnley, Lancashire, & that's where my adventure begins.

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So there I was, moved into the front room of a two up, two down terraced house in Burnley. The electricity had recently been cut off, forcing me in front of a gas fire for light, heat & cooking (half an hour for toast)... All around me lay the unkempt mess of a seventeen year old (messy as fuck)... to top it all off my band had recently split up & mi bird, Jane, had just got spots. Now I couldn't play any tunes for entertainment I was learning bass guitar on three strings of a beaten up acoustic, each one promising to snap at any moment. At this point I could play the entire bass line of wild thing & three others... I wanna be adored, She bangs the drums & I am the ressurection... all by my favourite band, The Stone Roses.

Now then, the Roses. Evidently ace, Manchester's finest & easily the greatest band since The Beatles, whose influence may not have been as wide as that of the Scousers, but is of a more subtle type that has affected an entire generation. Every decent band since those heady days of '89 has drawn inspiration from their mix of majesty & groove... Richard Ashcroft of the Verve had their poster shadowing his teenage years, Liam Gallagher was inspired to act after seeing The Roses play, & so on. For me & many others they were the soundtrack of youth, if not life, & whenever I hear one of their tracks, be it on an advertisement or in a club, a special familial moment always occurs. Tracks like Fools Gold are as famous as the National anthem & are as much a part of the country's psyche as are the drums at the end of an Eastenders episode. Personally, those four young scallys turned me onto music, which slowly led to songwriting, which in turn led to my chief passion in life, poetry. And without poetry I would never have written this book. If you ever buy this book lads, contact mi publisher & ask fer a refund, yer deserve it.

So, it was time to go. It was Easter 1994, the trees were sprouting leaves left, right & centre, the ducklings were clogging the canals & twinkles began to return to the eyes of the birds. Within me I began to feel a stir, which I can now recognise as the Spirit of Adventure, an instinctual impulse that has driven men from the safety of their homesteads on various crazy missions, where death, or at least a serious accident, await. I was first filled with the spirit as a young boy following the adventures of Asterix & Obelix as they took on the might of Ceaser's legions. Later, in the weekly Sunday morning race with my sister to see who woke up first & got control over the mornings TV, I became addicted to mister

Indiana Jones. Over the years I think I edged it, but through my sisters choice of video I now know all the lyrics to every song in Grease.

Adventuring is great fun, exciting & educational, a life being led. In early '93 I left Lancashire for my first proper adventure & had a wild old time. After surviving the perils of the North Peckham estate I toured England as far as Minehead, where I got a job as a burger boy at Butlins. Unfortunately my boss was a Bastard Rovers fan, & I was soon sacked. The money I saved up took me as far as Tarragona, near Barcelona, which was then stolen while I slept on the beach. My mum had to fly me home & I found myself back in Burnley... my adventure over but the thrilling taste of the tour still tantalising my essence & I was still only sixteen. So where to go this time. A stint at Butlins had served me well before, so I thought I'd try again.... this time closer to home in Yorkshire, & sunny Skegness.

It was time to do one from Burnley. For those who have never been it is a misty, old industrial town of about sixty thousand inhabitants nestled under the gaze of Pendle Hill, that lofty mound where the Lancashire witches would gather & cast spells on pregnant cows. Burnley is predominately a working class town, which means it's full of good people, pies & pubs. As a teenager it had everything I needed... clubs, drugs & birds. Also, my family lived there including the wonder of my life, mi Grandma Joan. Before I left for Skeggy she gave me a good dose of her home baking & a fiver, which coupled with the thirty quid income support money gave me £35 quid for the road. I spent my last evening in Burnley with Jane & my mate Jimmy C, smoking weed & chatting about the future, the innocent enthusiasm of youth bubbling beneath our talk. That night I made love to Jane & we slept in a warm embrace til morning came & it was time to set forth. Jane's mum dropped me off at the train station & they stood on the platform waving as my train pulled away. I waved back, not knowing when, or if, I would see them again.

Of course I didn't pay on the train. Almost exactly a year ago I became a Fader (Fare Evader), inducting myself into a wonderful art, skill, sport & blag that has been a constant feature of my nomadic life. I remember my first jump well. After spending three hours in the rain at the top of the M1, waiting for a lift down South, I thought fuck it, lets try the trains... & have never looked back (or paid) since. The train wound through the gorgeous green valleys of Todmorden & Hebden Bridge, past the steep slopes of Halifax, the curry houses of Bradford, the grey megalopolis that is Leeds & into view of the stately Minster at York. Now already I'd seen far too many Yorkshiremen for my Lancastrian liking, but the situation

was eased a little as we reached the desolate Moors. A little while later, past a windswept wilderness, the train pulled into Skegness & I breathed in the salty air of the coast.

Skegness is your typical Yorkshire seaside town. Often battered by the breeze flung ruthlessly across the North Sea from Scandinavian fjords, they often have a certain charm. Places like Scarborough & Whitley Bay are well worth a visit, & the region contains Robin Hoods Bay, a wayfarers paradise of little streets, good ale, old seadogs & their even older shantys. Yet that was the Bay & this was Skeggy. As it was mid April the place was hardly lively... in truth it was dead. The season was set to begin in a few weeks, so this was the best time to get a job. As I arrived late in the day I bought myself a room in a B&B & settled down for the night. With morning I arose, breakfasted, groomed myself & set off out in the search of work...

Ah Butlins! The paradise of childhood. On several occasions as a boy my family had gone lock, stock & barrel to Butlins for a weeks holiday. It was generally to the camp at Pwhelli, North Wales, sat idly on the coast & the focal point for the whole of the North West. The affordable nature of the holidays enabled many a working class kid to experience a real holiday, & boy were they good. Games, arcades, football, swimming, snooker, funfairs & archery were just a few distractions for a kid who usually had his head in a comic. Believe me I had a whale of a time & perhaps this was what had drawn me to the camps in the first place. I associated the place with pleasure & escape, & here I was again. Unfortunately, my sacking had been recorded (I had thrown milkshake over this bird who'd try to make me mop the floor - as if!) & I was forcibly ejected from the camp by a burly Security Guard. It seemed all my plans had come to naught & as I trudged along the beach I wondered what the hell was I gonna do. Then I looked at Skeggy & thought, *'Thank fuck fer that,'* & did the usual thing I did when I was homeless & in a bit of a scrape... I rang Nick.

Now Nick's mi best mate. Nearly ten years after this Golden Summer I'm about to tell you about our friendships as solid as ever, in fact I'm the godfather to his two-year old daughter, Kae-Lei, the cheekiest scampstress I've ever had the pleasure to buzz off. We met when we were ten, played footy together for various teams... were rival quarterbacks in the schoolyard when American football hit England in the late eighties... played the Ghost Valley Two track on Super Mario Kart at least a million times... messed about with Live Role Playin & then, as the teenage years took hold, started getting wrecked. The guy gave me my first ever spliff

& turned me onto the Stone Roses, took me raving & got me laid... what more can I say, he's my buddy-buddy longtime. I put my ten pee in the phone box (in the days before BT decided to be proper bandits & double the bloody cost of a call) & dialed that familiar number.

*"Alright Nick."*

*"Alright Damo."*

*"Listen, I've just tried to get a job at Butlins, but it's gone arse over tits... can I come an crash"*

*"Wait a minute...  
Mam, can Damo stay...  
Yeah no worries man."*

*"Sound... I'll give you a bell from Skipton!"*

*"Reyt!"*

*"Sorted!"*

So I put down the receiver, smiled a smile & left Skeggy... an I ain't never bin back since.

In the world beyond England's chilly East Coast the West Indian batsman, Brian Lara, scored 375 runs against a typically weak England seam attack. It was ten runs more than Sir Garfield Sobers, who was the first to congratulate him as he lefty the crease. Elsewhere Stockport had been fire-bombed & a middle-aged Irishman called Paul Hill was released from prison. He was the last of the seventeen Irish who had been wrongly imprisoned by Britain after the IRA hit England in the mid-seventies... you had the Birmingham 6, the Maguire 7 & the most famous group, the Guildford four. A film had just been released entitled '*In the Name of the Father*' which showed what had happened to Gerry Conlan at the hands of the British Justice system. After threats with revolvers followed by a hard diet of food & sleep deprivation... a broken Conlan signed the first thing in front of him. Combined with the suppression of vital witness statements this served to have an innocent man locked up for the better years of his life.

As the train left Skegness I found myself hiding in the toilets to avoid paying my fare... successfully of course. Once I had retaken my seat I sat

& pondered upon what the fate had in store for me... little did I know of the fun & frolics that lay in wait. My train meandered back awesterly to Leeds, where I swapped trains & trundled to othe old market town of Skipton. Now I've never really warmed to Skipton, there's something a little Stepford Wives about the place, & as the town's gloomy castle came into view I began to think I'd made the wrong move, rather like going off on holiday & finding yourself in Grimsby. Now as this was 1994, only certain stupidly rich Yanks had a mobile phone & the concept of text messaging was a twinkle in some clever geezers eye. Hardly anyone was hooked up to the internet so communication relied on the postal service (sketchy at the best of times) & the phone. I rang up Nick, told him where I was & waited the twenty or so minutes for him to arrive. He was driving his mate Ezy Ste's shiny black car & soon I was inside, smoking a spliff, watching Yorkshire turn into the far superior county of Lancashire.

Barnoldswick is a remarkable little town of about ten thousand souls, perched right on the border tween the roseate counties, still divided over which county they should belong to. It is about an hours bus ride from Burnley, which I had undertaken many times since Nick's family moved there in about 1990. The place is mental... everyone below the age of thirty is a raver... the chief currency of the town is weed & it is here that my eyes were opened to music, drugs & fun. On Saturday nights, after crazy hijinks in the town's pubs, a vast posse of Barlickers would drive en masse to the After Dark club in Morley... where on a night called The Orbit techno would blare out of the giant speakers, the roman ampitheatre like club heaving with many a raver. Wicked nights were had by all as Joey Beltram, West Bam & Sven Vath brought the club to such a pumpin height that the club easily became the techno capital of Britain.

So we drove down the, long sloping road from Thornton-in-Craven & into the hilly terraced streets of Barlick. On the corner of one stood the Rainhall Food House, an excellent Chinese chippy. O, did I forget to mention it, Nick is half Chinese & to this day his mum runs the chippy. On many an occasion I've said to myself how lucky I am to have a best mate whose mum runs a chippy & I said it again as I sat down in their kitchen to my favourite dish... it was the same every time, a massive pile of chips, fried rice & chicken curry... bliss!

*"So what are you gonna do Damo?"*

*"Fuck knows Nick, I'm reyt up fer some adventurin tho."*

*"Well, I've just been on the phone to mi sister Michelle, an she says there's a room goin near where she lives... rents paid up fer two months!"*

*"Cool... where is it?"*

*"Wales!"*

*"Wales!"*

*"Wales!"*

*"Cool!"*

And that was that. In a relative instance we were on our way, the two of us, best mates ready to take on the world. So this is how the world works... one person's life effects subtly, yet profoundly, another's. As I finished off my meal I remembered Michelle. She is Nick's eldest sister (he has three more younger ones) & has always had a rebellious streak. She's the kind of girl that ends up living in Wales fer fucks sake. Even as a fifth year at school, when I was a first year, I remember her prancing about sporting wild, bright purple hair. I quietly wondered what colour her hair was now...

After some final preparations for our trip we called on Ezy Ste. Now Ezy is a cool guy, a laugh-a-minute & always carrying weed. He lived with his mum, listening to jungle & drawing funky graffiti on his bedroom walls. He'd offered to drive us as far as Manchester, where we'd catch a train to Wales. Before we set off we all had a bucket & a few hot knives & by the time we hit that Victorian megalopoli we were pretty fuckin stoned. It was hilarious watchin Ezy tryin to find somewhere to park. He did tho, & we went for a farewell beer. Next door to the pub was a music shop, & I remembered that Supersonic had been released the previous week by that new Manchester band, Oasis. I wandered in, found a copy on vinyl & paid my four quid or so... proud as punch I rejoined the lads.

*"Who's them?"*

asked Ezy.

*"It's Oasis... they're pretty good"*

*"They look like the Roses,"*

said Nick.

*"I reckon they're gonna be massive,"*

Said I. Now, it would be easy to say I had such an insight, but there was some kind of mystical buzz that surrounded those particular Scallys in the early days. It was the same energy that overtook Alan McGhee of Creation records as he watched them play in King Tuts Glasgow, & immediately signed them once they stepped off-stage. My own first taste of the buzz came from a free tape that was offered with an NME in early 94. On it was an early version of Cigarettes & Alcohol & the tune just blew me away.

With a few beers down our necks & my new record tucked under mi arm, Ezy Ste said his farewells & left us to the road. All about us lay Manchester... or to two kids from Lancashire, Madchester. It was a place where Bez would dance about shakin his maracas, where Ian Brown would swagger about cool as fuck. It was a place where you got shot if you even caught a bus thro Moss Side, a place to go shoppin at Christmas & ravin if you were feelin adventurous. It was the place of the G-Mex, Old Trafford & the Arndale. It was the city of the Hacienda & Sankeys Soap. To a true Lancastrian (none of this Greater Manchester nonsense) we had a simple name for the place... Skankymancwankland, god bless 'em. But it was always the music that belted out of Manchester's bands that mattered the most. From the Carpets *'Find out why'* on Saturday Morning TV, to parking me arse on the dance-floor whenever *Sit Down* came on down a nightclub, to having mi baths after footy to *Some Friendly*, it was always there. As a kid whenever I had a bath it would always take a stereo into the bathroom & play *Some Friendly*. We made our way across to Piccadilly station, checked for a train to Cardiff, & made our way onto the train.

*"So how we gonna jump it then?"*

Asked Nick, who'd never Faded before.

*"Easily!"*

And off set the train.

\*

The train jump to Wales was an easy affair... a simple buffet-trip pass-by move on the conductor found us sitting in the Dead Zone (the area where he had already swept), smiling widely, the next stop Wales. We passed through Cheshire, Shropshire & Gloucestershire before pulling in to Bristol one early afternoon in late April. From there we jumped on a big intercity that was heading to Cardiff, which was so advanced in it's journey the conductor was sat on his arse... then we came to Newport. Following a cursory inspection of the town to our surprise we found it looked just like England. In a record shop window we saw a poster advertising an Oasis gig in Newport in a week or two...

*“Buzzin, we’ve gotta go!”*

From Newport we caught a train a little train that wound through North through the valleys. Here we were in the heartlands of Wales, where the hills echo the sweetly sung songs of the miners & the chief occupation of the women was getting pregnant as soon as possible & living off benefits. This *job* reminded me of Liverpool's main source of income... accident claims. Deeper into those trench-like vales we found ourselves in a small town not far from Blackwood. We went to Michelles & were welcomed with a slap feast. Suitably fed we caught a couple of buses & arrived in an obscure village. There, she introduced us to her friend Lisa, who gave us the keys to her pad & scarpered. Michelle then went to work & me Nick were alone, quite a long way from Lancashire & wondering how the hell did we end up here?

*Ynyssdu!* I still can't really believe I lived there.... What a mad litter place. Firmly entrenched in the valleys, home for a few hundred mad Welsh, it sported a rugby pitch, Mobile chippy & shop. I didn't see many leeks & I didn't hear much singin, but the people were friendly & accomodating, even the very kind woman in the shop giving us credit when we went hungry. Across an Iron bridge over a little river you could walk along a grassy, disused railway that once used to take the coal from the valleys to civilisation. Our home stood on Commercial Street, me & Nick living downstairs & two crazy Welsh guys upstairs. We shared a kitchen, although all they ever seemed to eat were brown sauce butties. Our own fare was hardly better, oven chips, sausages, plummed tomatoes & fish fingers... a hell of a lot of fish fingers. There was also Mari-mari. He was a little budgie left behind in the flat & we soon grew hardened to his constant tweetin. It was nice to have a pet & before too long we were firmly attached to the little fella... we were like a family!

A couple of fifteen-year old schoolgirls soon collared us & we were invited to babysittin sessions with them... booze, aspliffs & snoggin ensued but me & nick positively refused to assist their quest for child benefit money & housing benefit... but they were dead sound all the same. On a couple of occasions we went to the one-screen cinema in Blackwwod, all sat snogging & fumbling in the dark. We saw Ace Ventura rescue the Miami Dolphin's pet Dolhin (reyt funny) & creased up at a showing of Cool Runnings & the Jamaican Bob Sled team's Eddie the Eagle Edwards style efforts to win gold at the '88 Calgary Winter Olympics... again, reyt funny.

For cash we signed on up in Blackwood, about £5 quid a week pocket money seeing as we had no rent to pay. Enough for spliffs on the hillside, pool down the pub & our munchies. Michelle's mate had left us a stereo, so we listened to Supersonic & this tape that Michelle had given us. It was *Debut* & we instantly fell for her quirky, haunting voice as she grooved away through tunes such as Human Behaviour, Violently happy &

*The hard core, & the gentle,  
Big Time Sensuality...*

At Blackwood we met the first manager of the Manic Street Preachers. He was a bit slow, like someone who's not quite nappy trained when everyone else was using potties. It turns out the Manics soon dropped him when success loomed. I also got to know one of Michelles' arty mates, Lisa. She lived in a nice cottage & lent us a casio keyboard to make some tunes on. One day, whilst waiting for our smoke to arrive, we were struck by the muse & expressed ourselves in song, Mari-Mari tweeting along to the tune. Weed is a clear classic... drawin on the classical three chord turnaround, CFG, we told the story of a simple country boy caught by the fuzz, locked up & needin a smoke. We got the chorus from a vocal Nick buzzed off down the Orbit... here's the lyrics;

*Way back when I was a farmer  
Growin some marijuana  
In the middle of a bush-like-field,  
Smokin all the crops I yield,  
And you don't know what I need,  
Yes you don't know what I need,  
I need some weed...*

*Herb a weed an a  
Weed a gange an a  
Ganja a weed an a  
Weed a marijuana*

*I sold some ganja to my lover,  
She was a copper undercover,  
Now I drink water with my bread,  
Don't have a reefer to ease my head,  
And you don't know what I need,  
Yes you don't know what I need,  
I need some weed...*

See what I mean, a clear classic  
Splashed all cross the headlines at the time were the forthcoming  
Presidential Elections in South Africa. For decades that vasty country  
swathed across Africa's southern tip had been the problem-child of global  
harmony. Apartheid had not eased a fundamentally racist system, where  
an Imperial white minority once again kept an indigenous people  
shackled in semi-slavery. But the age of Empire had passed & eventually  
the voices of the native blacks & a contemptuous world boomed too  
loudly & *Nelson Mandela* was freed. He became the leader of the African  
National Congress & was put up for election... & a democratic one at  
that. A landslide was expected & despite a series of bombings by  
anarchist neo-nazis attempting to disrupt them, he became the first black  
president of South Africa. As he was being sworn in dignitaries from all  
across the world sweltered in the African heat, but everyone of them was  
happy as the world seemed to step into a new era of harmony. The three  
centuries old flag was furled, a new flag raised & the decolonisation of  
Africa became complete. Meanwhile, on the back pages, thirty-four year  
old *Ayrton Senna* drove his last race, crashing on the streets of San  
Marino. There was mourning across the world as the three-times World  
Champion passed away.

On the arrival of a giro we caught the bus to Newport on a combined  
scouting & shopping mission. As we passed thro Ynyssdu's neighbouring  
village, *Cymfeilanfach* (pronounced cum-vel-lin) we noticed how much  
the word looked like *Come for a feel and a fuck...* called the latter from  
that moment onwards. After an hour or so of Southerly winding we  
arrived at Newport. It's not *that* bad a place, & I liked the bridge that  
spans the river. The shops were cool enough & from a record stall at the  
market I got two tickets for the Oasis gig... After a Maccy Dees we  
wound back home & slapped on Oasis...

*“I’m feelin Supersonic  
Give me gin & tonic”*

I think it was a Thursday when they came to town. About the same time the dodgy guy from upstairs rolls down Commercial Road in a funky little green Datsun. We didn’t ask where it came from, but bought it fer thirty quid. Nick loves his drivin, how many a cruise had I shared with him buzzin about our homelands. After putting in two pounds worth of petrol we rode the road to Newport... the bus journeys now a distant memory. After parking up we admired our green steed then went to scout out TJ’s, where the gig was gonna happen. It was yer typical small town venue... a stage, a dance floor & a bar, with rock-stars & album covers plastered across every inch of wall space. We found out the time it all kicked off & headed back out into sunshine. Just as we did so a big white van with Salford van hire emblazened across it pulled up outside the venue. The doors slid open & who would cockily burst out onto the pavement but Mr Liam Gallagher. He was inside the venue in a flash, followed a little more casually by Bonehead & Noel. Further up the street we met the rythym section, Tony MaCarrol & Guigsy, munching on a Maccy Dees.

*“Good luck with the gig fellas!”*

*“O... cheers!”*

They said with the novelty of being stopped & recognized in the streets of a foreign country... something they would have to get used to very quickly.

Oasis were formed in 1992 when Liam Gallagher & Bonehead formed a band called Rain. Apparently they weren’t very good, but when Noel Gallagher turned up in Manchester, flush with cash after roadieing on the Inspiral Carpets US tour, things were about to get better. After playing the other Burnage boys *Live Forever* they were bowled over enough to let him take over the band. Kitting them out with good gear with his wages he proceeded to write the stuff of Definitely Maybe & gig like hell. In ’94 their blend of Sex-pistols energy & Beatles melody seemed to strike a chord, & for a year or so they could do no wrong.

After smoking a few spliffs in the balmy evening’ air we handed over our tickets & found ourselves in the gloomy depths of DJ’s. The roadies were setting up the gear & checking sound, while the club begin to slowly fill up... very slowly. On the floor of the stage a roadie taped down the

set list & I checked it out. Supersonic was down, as was Cigarettes & Alcohol, both tunes I knew. Then at the bottom I saw I Am the Walrus scribbled down.

*“Yo Nick, they’re playin the Beatles!”*

And on they came, the fifty or so punters not really sure what was gonna happen. They barely spoke a word as they thundered through their set, tune after tune of crunching guitars, loud drums & Liam’s crackling chaunt. Proper buzzin. Miles better than some dodgy rave or a cider-srowned hootenanny. So this was Rock ‘n’ Roll... cool! Then I am The Walrus came on & we had a bit of a dance, as were most of the other fifty or so...

*“Cheers... good night!”*

And then they were gone. The club emptying in a sort of semi-daze, but all acknowledging that Oasis weren’t bad at all. Outside, Nick skinned up a spliff while I bought a couple of cans of lager & we chilled out under the stars. All of a sudden the temperature dropped & we decided to drive home. Unfortunately, back at the Datsun she wouldn’t start.

*“Must be petrol...”*

Said Nick & we pushed a mile through the lamplit streets of Newport til we found a garage. In to the tank went our last two quid & I stood nervously waiting while Nick turned the ignition... nothing happened. Luckily enough, a guy who recognized us from the gig passed by. We explained our predicament & he took us to a student party. There, we smoked the last of our weed & talked about the gig with other guys & it was all kinda cool. However, some guy spewed in some other guys bed & we all got kicked out.

*“What shall we do now!”*

*“We gonna have ter sleep in car!”*

*“Yer jokin!”*

*”What else can we do?”*

It wasn’t the best nights sleep we’ve ever had, scrunched up in the back of a datsun, no coat on & cold as fuck. It wasn’t quite sleeping rough but

it was pretty damn close. After a few uncomfortable hours Dawn broke & we were at the bus station waiting for the bus. I retold our story to the driver, of how we had bought a Datsun, how we had been to a gig, how we'd had to sleep in the car & how we had no cash.

*"On yer go boyos!"*

And we were away. On getting back to our little room it was the first time we'd valued it as a home... & it was good to be back.

I turned round to Nick, & with a cheeky smile said,

*"Yo Nick, we live in fuckin Wales!"*

For teenagers music has always played an important role. As they struggle for an identity of their own they associate themselves with the icons & idols that make them buzz the most. After the Oasis gig we felt ourselves full of rock 'n' roll. The crunch of the guitars still swirled around our heads, the bass & drums gave us a groove to our step... & we wanted more. Out came the keyboard. Suddenly me & Nick were the new Lennon & McCartney as we proceeded to pen such classics as (*Whats yer*) *Problem Babe & Teenage Funkland* in a stony haze. Then one day, during a lull in jaming to they casio beat, something struck me. I was looking at a map of the region & saw the town of Monmouth...

*"Fuckin Hell Nick... that's where the Roses are recordin!"*

*"Where!"*

*"Monmouth... it's just over the border. Come on Nick, let's check 'em out & see where that bloody album is."*

Now the Stone Roses, instead of seizing world domination when it was in the palm of their hands, the looping funk of Fools Gold teaching everyone how to dance properly, the Roses chose to be enigmatic. It had been four years since they'd released a tune & they'd decided to spend the million pounds Geffen had given each of them. The world had waited... & waited... & waited... & fuckin waited & still not even a whimper. Yet they still retained the aura of Britains coolest band & reports in the press had said the album was imminent, the final touches being laid down at Rockfield studios, near Monmouth.

*"Let's go!"*

We borrowed a tent & off we went.

About the same time of our soiree to the stars John Smith, leader of the Labour party, died. Before his well-mourned passing it was universally understood that he would be the next prime minister... & a good one at that. After over fifteen years of Toryism, it was time for a change. Although Maggie Thatcher had got the country back on it's feet after the chaotic seventies, by '94 the party she once ruled with an iron fist was a corrupt organisation led by an excruciatingly dull PM, John Major. The shift was coming, however, the elections due in 1997 & everybody felt Labour would win. On Smith's death, the name of a young, dazzling Labour MP began to be spoken... Tony Blair.

A bus-ride & a train jump later we found ourselves pullin into Abergavenny, a strange sounding name right on the border. Monmouth wasn't served by train, so we blagged some local budweiser boy too drive us there for a fiver. So there we were, razzin down the road with a local wise guy, the sun setting over Wales behind us, the English border ahead. We crossed into the motherland & before too long were entering the scenic streets of Monmouth. On the outskirts of town we found a camp-site, & in the failing light snook on thro a back field & set up camp. By the time the tent was up & we'd had a reefer or two a case of 'What next?' occurred.

*"Reyt, I think Rockfield's a couple of miles out of town... so I'll go & check it out."*

*"Nice one... I'll chill here & get stoned."*

*"Nice one... inabit!"*

*"Inabit."*

With one rolled I set off along a country road. Above the stars were singing & I was enveloped in the bosom of a warm May night. Up ahead, somewhere (I hoped) lay Rockfield Studios. After a couple of miles the shadow of a building loomed out of the gloom. It turned out to be a farmhouse & just as I was walking to the door to check it out, a car razzed up beside me on the drive. This guy leaps out sporting a baseball cap & all at once I clicked... it was fuckin Ian Brown.

*“Can I help yer kid?”*

*“Yeah mate, I’ve come to see what the Stone Roses are up to!”*

*“Cool, come in!”*

So there I was, sat in the control room of Rockfield Studios, chattin to Reni about a Roses gig in Colne (near Burnley) & Ian Brown buzzin about, his mane completely shaved off & renouncing all drugs. The Roses’ producer then turns up with two Yanks who had been sent over by Geffen to see where all their money had gone & to listen to the album. Mani was away & Squires was off taking coke somewhere but there was one guy missin.

*“Lads... I can’t stay on mi own, mi mates waitin down at the campsite.”*

*“No worries... we’ll go pick him up.”*

Sound as fuck... none of yer pop star bullshit... simply sound as fuck. We roared the couple of miles down the road in their motor, Reni at the wheel. Then with a screech & a spin we razzed up the camp site, pulling up right outside the tent. I got out, unzipped & poked me head inside... Nicky looked stoned.

*“Yo Nick, I’m wi Stone Roses!”*

*“Eh!?”*

*“No, swear down... come on, wi gonna listen to the new album!”*

*“Reyt, I’ll get mi weed!”*

After introductions me & Nick were just about to get in the car when who would show up but a pretty pissed-off campsite owner.

*“Oy there boyos, what yer doin!”*

*“It’s alright mate, they’re with us,”*

Said Brown.

*“Wait a minute... they haven’t even paid!”*

*“We’ll sort you out in the morning mate,”*

I said & jumped in the car with Nick. I can’t quite remember, but I’m sure they made more noise when they left than when they arrived.

*The rest of the summer was spent touring the country, seeing Oasis play again at our first Glastonbury, the ANL Rally at Brixton & the play-offs at Wembley, plus many other fun events.*