

## **Desmond Abba was born in 1917 and interviewed in 1997**

### **Lost a Ten Bob Note so he didn't fly**

I went to the British School in Castle Street all the way up until I was fourteen. The back yard was against the back wall of the house where we lived on Wildman Street and if I was a little bit pushed for time I used to go over our back wall into the school yard. And it was grand until one of the teachers, Brockbank it was, "Get back over that wall and come in the proper way." Of course by this time I'd come round prayers were on and he lined up all those that were late - and I got the stick hundreds of times from Brockbank. He was very free with the cane. Aunt Mabel used to say "Oh go for a loaf of bread will you?" just about five to nine. I just hadn't time to go for the bread and get round to school prayers for nine o'clock. Always late, niver my fault.

I was in the cubs and scouts when we left school and I went camping with the scouts to Kirkby Lonsdale. I had a big tent and a teacher wanted to borrow it just after school broke up, he said for a week. Then somebody else came "Could he borrow the tent?" and I said "You can only have it when he brings it back". So I wrote a letter - letters in them days - to the teacher saying "Please when you come back at Kendal Station will you look out for a Mr So and So 'cos he wants the thing". All hell was let loose when he next saw me. "I was going to stay another week with the tent and I had to fetch it back".

We used to go camping at Kirkby Lonsdale Devils Bridge, near where all the motorbikes used to park. We had big sloping tents, bell tent. We mostly learned knot tying and things like that with the scouts. We went to two or three places then somebody said we could join up with the Zions in the old Chapel.

I was always keen on joinery. We did this at the Tech School. Always when we finished the class we had to line up in the centre facing the teacher. He used to say "About Turn." And we marched out. When I finished school it was the night of the woodwork class. We were standing as normal, but this time he came down the side and was asking us what we were going to do. When he came to me I said "A Joiner." And he just said straight away, "Well tell your dad to go with you to Mr Thexton on Sandes Avenue and the job's yours. He asked me to look for a likely lad". I was the only one that wanted to be a joiner.

I was only sixteen or seventeen when I was doing funerals on my own. We had a contract with the workhouse up Windemere Road for five pound to bury them at the cemetery. We used to make the coffins, Norman Burton and me. He was always at one end and me at the other. When we went past the Union Tavern pub we never said anything but we changed hands and lifted it over from one shoulder to the other. We could do it perfectly. It always tickled the landlord. That was in the days when Alf Ward had his horse and hearse.

We had some queer dos at that job. One man we had to bury had been in the reservoir for about six months. Ugh! Another chap was that fat we couldn't lift him he was so heavy so Norman had an idea. He measured round the man. He worked out how far this chap was in a circle and we put the coffin at the right distance. We packed up some blocks so the body was level and we rolled him over. He didn't land quite flat, he was a little bit up on one side. When we got to the cemetery, the hearse driver and me lowered him down and there was just a girth at either side. After that there was always an extra man accompanying the hearse.

One day I was repairing a wooden item for a friend when my finger got caught in the machine cutter. There was only me in the workshop. I could tell it was bad so I bandaged it up, jumped on my pushbike and went to Dr. Edgecombe's at Stramongate. I looked in the



waiting room, it was full of folk. I said "Do you mind if I go straight in? I've taken some fingers off". "Aye me lad, quite all right" they said. The Doctor said "It's no good you'll have to go to the hospital. Can you make your way there?" So I went to see my Uncle and he would go with me to the hospital. I had my overalls on and this nurse said "Best have these off". I said "Well I've nothing on underneath" so she said "You'd better keep them on then". They stitched me hand up and the next thing I knew I came round in a little bed down at the side of another bed because they were so full there wasn't room. The ward was full apparently. There was a chap in the next bed to me and I looked at his hand and he had only two fingers on it. He was an old joiner from Windermere way. I'm eighty-two years old that would be about 75 years ago.

When I was a young lad they had aeroplane trips from the Longlands Showfield. Malcolm Campbell and him that got killed at Coniston came. There was only one aeroplane but they had a racing car as well. When the aeroplane took off at Longlands it only just managed to lift over the houses from Kendal at the bottom of the field and when it came in again it just cleared them. My mother gave me a ten bob note to take a trip. Ten bob in those days was like ten pound and more. I put the note in my pocket. I couldn't get the courage for a bit but I thought well she has given me the money so I'll have to do it. When I felt in me pocket I'd lost the dammed money. I daren't tell my mother so I made out I'd been up. I should have been the first in Kendal to be able to say I'd been up there!

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