

## Chapter 1

### Deuteronomy,

**“Do not forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart all the days of your life. Rather tell them to your children and your children’s’ children.”**

Isn't it strange, how, even on a hot sunny day in May, a stone step can feel so cold? It was remarkable too how the cold could penetrate through a thin pair of shorts and bring such comfort to a body that could really do with lying in a bath of cold water or wallowing in a cool swimming pool. To the side of the step, where the sun's rays were being reflected into the porch, the stone was almost too hot to touch and yet strangely the heat was not being conducted into the rest of the step. David ran his hand over the smooth edge from the hot to the cold areas and noted the evenness of the top surface which had mainly been produced by his father sharpening the carving knife and his mother, scrubbing and whitening the step daily. Every Sunday morning Dad would sharpen the knife in preparation for carving the Sunday joint and every morning Mum would clean the step. Dad took great pride in the sharpness of the carver, which had been given to them on their wedding day and had been sharpened so many times by Dad and the knife grinder man who came along at intervals with his strange barrow which looked a little like a sewing machine. He would pedal rapidly and the stones would spin around in front of his face. He would then take the knife and sharpen it on the stone throwing off clouds of sparks. By now the knife was only about half an inch across having had about an inch of steel ground away.

Mum also took great pride in the appearance of the step. The glazed brick step below was far less important over recent years. In the past it had to be maintained with red cardinal polish, which was a job on its own. After applying the polish David's mum would buff up the surface to create a shine in which one could almost see a reflection of one's face. This was followed by about half an hour trying to clean the red polish off of her fingers. Nowadays, however, Dad had painted the step with a red paint and although not having quite the shine or the smell, was adequate. In fact David could rest his feet on the lower step and had little worry about spoiling the shine. His mind was far away on problems he just could not have anticipated.

He was trying to control the emotion that had been building up in him over the past few weeks. He felt so angry and cheated and yet he had no one to blame and no one to swear at. He honestly didn't know whether to shout and scream or just burst into tears. The latter seemed to be the way he felt at the moment, but he knew that young men of his age didn't cry. He had become a great believer in God over the past year or so, which was partly due to the fact that his heart throb was a keen church goer, but his belief was certainly under some serious strain at the moment. He was told that God was all good and anything bad was from the devil. Well, where was God now that He was needed and where were the miracles that He was supposed to perform? What a situation!

Was it only last month that he was sitting the final examinations in his National Diploma of Design and he had been involved in submitting designs and arranging for the decorations that were to deck the front of Sutton Town Hall to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth? Was it only last month that the world looked as if it was going to be his oyster and that openings for his future career were flowing in and he was being confronted with having to make a choice of which route to take? Was it only last month that he was playing cricket for his local team St. Anthony's, and achieved the best bowling figures he had ever had with this club. He had taken seven wickets for a mere forty seven runs and had, with his accurate throwing, run another batsman out. He could see no way out of this predicament. There seemed very little to live for. Only the support of his family and his young

girlfriend, Janet, gave him some reason for continuing to feel that life might be worth living and perhaps he should wait a little and see how things go.

He could hear the sound of children playing games in the road and on the green outside his house and music being played on the latest record player. It was a tune well known to him as it was played regularly at the youth club he attended twice a week and was called the Blue Tango. The sound production was very poor, scratchy and muffled and he knew that the fibre tip of the needle should have been sharpened before the record had been played. He knew all the celebrations were in aid of the Queen's Coronation and as all over the estate, the old tradition of holding the party in the middle of the street had been reverted to and all the roads had been closed for that particular reason. There were only one or two cars that ever used that road anyway and many of the motorists would be over in the St. Anthony's Arms drinking more ale than was good for them, dancing the knees up and singing all the old songs many of which originated in the First World War.

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by small feet running up his pathway.

"Mum said, would you like to come and have some tea with us on the tables in the road".

It was a little boy of about five or six years old who was holding tight on to the hand of an even smaller girl, whom David assumed was his sister. He couldn't recognise them although they seemed to be dressed in party clothes, the little girl in a dress that spread out from the waist and the boy in a smart white shirt with long sleeves and shorts. He didn't know quite what to say to them, it was about three in the afternoon, although he wasn't sure, but he felt to join the whole group of children would be a little demeaning. This was such a kind gesture but how could he respond without hurting the feelings of these very pleasant children and what sort of message could he give them which would not upset the kind mother who had sent them? He also wondered whether all the eyes of the mothers and children were on him as the noise of laughter and shouting had ceased. He thanked the children and explained that he had just had his tea and was quite full up, which was a lie as he had not eaten since dinner time and in this heat he was feeling quite thirsty. The children stood in silence for a while, the boy then turned around and began to pull his sister away. She, however, stood her ground and was not to be put off by this answer.

"Could you come and just join in the games then".

David, who was now approaching his seventeenth year and about to make his way in the world, felt that he was not yet equipped in life to deal with such an honest request.

"I don't think that I will know the games you are playing" was his feeble and inadequate reply.

"That's alright" she replied, "Me and Johnny can teach you and they are really easy, all you have to do is to follow us in and out of the paper hats and streamers. You'll soon get the hang of it and then you can do it all on your own and there is a prize for the winner".

David felt as if the ground had opened up below him and he imagined himself skipping between the hats and streamers and having the final humiliation of winning the prize. He tried to explain to the little girl that he didn't think that he was able to do all the running and jumping entailed in their games and perhaps they should tell their mummy, thank you but he was happy where he was. Johnny pulled at his sister's arm but his little sister stood firm.

"Mummy said we must not take no as an answer and we should not come back unless we have you in tow".

"Tell Mummy, thank you, but I can't come".

With that the two turned and ran down the pathway and out onto the small green that lay in front of the house. There was silence for a short time and then the music started up and he could hear the sound of laughter and small feet racing up and down the pavement and road. David stood up and rubbed his backside to get the blood circulating and ease the pressure from the hard step. This was a mistake which he later would regret, but at the time felt was necessary. He did contemplate going indoors and finding a pillow to sit on, but partly through laziness and partly because it would look strange taking a pillow off the bed and putting it on an outside step which may not have pleased his mother. He sat down again on the cold step and let his thoughts swing back almost thirteen years when he sat on the same step in the same doorway and about the same time of the year.