

A LONDON BOY

BOOK TWO

Why is this book two? and not part two?

Because I never really finished A London Boy (The first book) which I guess should had been called A LONDON BOY book one, or part one, maybe?

And so, A LONDON BOY, Book Two,
More...

A Brief Synopsis...

True stories about me and my streetwise mates growing up in London, and some of the trials, trouble and tribulations we got up to. Begins in the late 60's.

And a Longer Synopsis...

I started writing down funny things my children said and did in a diary, I did this so one day when they are much older, I could show them what they said and did when they were kids. When I was writing down these funny and memorable events, I started reminiscing about my own childhood and younger adult self, then started to write down these memories in the back of the diary. I thought it could be something additional for my kids to read. The reason I was doing this was because I didn't take much notice of what my own parents told me about themselves and their antics. I wished I had asked more and listened to what my parents had to say about themselves, and what they got up to when they were kids and young adults. Thing is, they did tell me some funny stories that I do remember, but It's too late to ask now, but at least what I can do is put pen to paper and write down my own memories and adventures. My kids do ask me questions sometimes, like, how did we manage without mobile phones or the internet, what came before RFID bank cards.

I tell them story's about how hard it was to find a working telephone box that was piss and shit free, and how we collected the X rated business cards advertising various expert sexual engagements and consultations from these phone boxes, and the importance of having to be able to write letters, send cheques though the post, the existence of huge shopping catalogues, the value of having cash, and they laugh

at me. I told a friend what I was doing, and she asked me if she could have a look at the memoirs in the diary. She had told other friends and other people at work about it, and it made them reminisce and laugh. She said I bet other people would enjoy this read as much as she and other people did. And that I should make it into a book. I did, and so here it is...Just some of the true uncensored and possibly incriminating stories of me and some mates growing up in London S.E.10, That I dare tell,

Anyway, here we are again. First, I'll tell you that just because the first book "A London Boy" started in the late 1960's, don't expect this to be "A London Boy" - Book Two, starting in the late 1980's cos it ain't.

This is a continuation book. Why? There is still more to tell, and at the time decisions had to be made about just how much I could divulge and put in the first book when it was written.

So, don't expect to read stories about me when I was older, and how I got run over by a car in a supermarket carpark by a female who just wanted to get my attention, and how I was taken to hospital by the same women who ran me over, and then attended to my injuries after she had parked her car in the hospital carpark because she was an ER nurse at the hospital that she had dropped me off at.

Or, the time when me, Jack and our girlfriends got drunk, stripped bare, and then went for a skinny dip swim in the sea at Margate, and when we came out of the sea, we found out our cloths had been stolen, and how we travelled home naked. That can wait for another book.

So, this book is a continuation, that's why it's called "A London Boy Book Two". And just like the first book, the chapters do not start at a certain age, or in any chronological order...

Let's get on with it then...

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CHAPTER 1

COMEDY CIRCUS BIKES

In the mid seventy's we all had bicycles (Bikes) none were new, they were made up of bits that were found dumped mostly on old bomb sites where houses had once been. These sites were boarded up houses that were in various states of demolition from the bombings back in WW2. People used to throw unwanted stuff over the high fence's like sofa's, cooking stoves, old TV's, Bikes etc.

These derelict houses were surrounded by six or eight feet high galvanised corrugated iron sheeting, that were often covered in multiple thick layers of paper advertising for wrestling matches or films that were showing at local cinemas etc.

The advertising posters covered signs put up by the council that said, "BUILDING UNSTABLE, DEEP EXCAVATIONS RISK OF INJURY OR DEATH, DO NOT ENTER".

These large paper sheets of advertising were glued to the galvanised metal fencing with copious amounts of paste that had puddled onto the pavement over the many years, strangely, nothing seemed to grow in these areas, the paste must have had something in it to stop mould and plants taking root.

To gain access to these old dumping grounds we would throw a jacket or an old hessian sack over the sharp corrugated iron sheeting's top edge, and scramble over the top of the fence and drop down the other side into the front or back garden, once we were on the other side we were out of prying eyes.

We would all wander off in different directions in these overgrown grass wastelands' full of sapling trees and weeds. Always littered with rubbish thrown over the fence, old smashed TV's, radios, rusty bedframes, old iron stoves.

JACK: LOOK! I got a bike front wheel and tyre! Twenty-six-inch size!

TOBY: LOOK! I got a wheel and tyre! Twenty-six-inch size! It's a back wheel!

ME: I found a bike frame!

We forced a corrugated iron panel in the fence out of its wooden frame in one corner, just enough to squeeze ourselves and our prizes back out, and then started to make our way back home.

JACK: A front wheel is all I need for my bike,

TOBY: I can't believe it; I GOT A BACK WHEEL!

ME: We all got what we need now to fix up our bikes, where we going to go with them?

TOBY: Cowboy land!

JACK: Yeah! Cowboy land!

Cowboy land was an area on Blackheath in Greenwich London that had been mined for gravel long before I was born, it's close to the top south east corner of Greenwich park.

Across the road from Cowboy land was a small hilly place called the "Dips". Cowboy land and the Dips was the place to go if you had a bicycle and wanted to participate in some "Off road" experiences.

As we all lived in the same street, and since I had a few tools, we assembled ourselves and our bike bits on the pavement outside my house.

We started putting our bikes together, we could hardly believe our luck, we all had the bits we needed to complete our projects.

Ok, so we didn't all have brakes, or brakes that even worked in some cases. Toby's bike was missing the bolt that held his seat up, but that didn't matter, because he was short anyway.

I had odd length pedal crank-arms, and Jacks bike had a girl's frame and was pink. We assembled our bikes and leaned them up against the fence railings at the front of my house to proudly look at them.

My bike sort of looked ok, but Toby's and Jacks bikes both had an obvious issue. Jacks front wheel was a 26 inch, and Toby's rear wheel was 26 inch in size, but Jacks back wheel was a 20-inch wheel and Toby's front wheel was 20 inch in size.

And just to make things worse, Toby's bike had drop handlebars and Jacks bike had high-rise chopper style handlebars fitted.

ME: Why don't you both swap wheels,

JACK: Yeah! Give me your back-wheel Toby,

TOBY: I got a better idea, you give me your front wheel, and you can have my front wheel,

The arguing went on for quite a while until I got on my bike and started to pedal up the road. They quickly stopped their arguing and grabbed their own bikes and quickly caught me up. As we were cycling down the road on our comedy circus bicycles the arguing starts again.

TOBY: It's alright for you Leo, your bikes normal, I'm fucking well looking at the ground all the time,

JACK: Yeah! Mines like one of those penny farthings bikes,

We didn't stop at road crossings, we just bumped up and down the road's kerbstones. That's when I realised that there was something wrong with my bike.

The frame was sort of bouncing like it had suspension. I looked down and could see that the bikes frame downtube was not connected to the headtube, it looked like the welding had broken away.

This could had been the reason the bicycle frame had been thrown away and dumped. This didn't worry me because I found that I was able to control this bouncing feature, and it amused me.

I would forcefully push down on the handlebars as I went up and down kerbstones and bumps and found that I could bounce the bike up and down as I was going along, it was like it was a coiled spring. I found this bouncing a fun and amusing thing to do.

We managed to get to "Cowboy land" without too many mechanical failures, like chains coming off or handlebars not tightened up enough. When we got there, we went for a try out session around the "Dips".

Most of the worn-out grassless dirt bike paths were only wide enough for one bike, so we would take turns at being leader.

Because we followed each other really closely, and there was no room for overtaking, and due to a lack of decent brakes if the leader crashed, we would all end up in a pile on top of each other.

Already bruised and bloodied by our accidents at the "Dips", we crossed the road to "Cowboy land" and lined up at the top of a long steep gravel hill. We kept quiet for a while as we looked down the slope.

ME: Who's going first then?

JACK: Toby's bikes got brakes almost, he should go first,

ME: Yeah, I agree,

TOBY: Fuck off,

JACK: You got brakes Toby, I ain't,

TOBY: Fuck off,

ME: All right, give me your bike and I'll go,

TOBY: Fuck off, NO! I'll go first then,

Toby pats and rubs his bike then he does a sort of deep breathing exercise, Me and Jack look at each other and wonder what the fuck he is doing.

He then just takes off, peddling as fast as he can and yelling "Aaaaaarrrrrrhhhhh!" as he speeds down the gravel hill with the bike uncontrollably wobbling. Toby is trying to keep his bike going in a straight line as we both laugh at him.

The bravado yelling briefly stops and starts again as he goes over a mound at the bottom of the hill where he should had stopped.

Then the yelling becomes a scream as the bicycle and passenger go over the mound, he momentarily leaves the ground, then he and bike vanish as he goes over the back of the hill and out of sight.

Me and Jack drop our bikes and run down the hill to find Toby and bike in a thick bush. I shout in Toby's direction.

ME: You alright?

TOBY: Fuck off! Good thing this bush was here,

JACK: Yeah! If you didn't hit this bush, you could had hit another bush!

ME: What happened?

TOBY: The brakes don't work,

I have a look at his bike,

ME: You idiot! You put the brake blocks in backwards, they shot out when you pulled on the brake lever!

Me and Jack are laughing at Toby's mistake.

JACK: You wanker,

TOBY: I didn't know did I,

As Toby drags himself and his bike out of the bush his bum is facing us,

JACK: Did you have cornflake's for breakfast Tobes?

TOBY: What?

JACK: I can see right up your bum hole, looks like cornflakes to me!

And so, Toby's day had just gotten worse, as he has ripped his Jeans badly, and he is obviously not wearing any underwear.

We take a short cycle ride across Blackheath to a boating pond near a pub called the Princess of wales to see if anyone was racing any model boats that day.

The pond is quite dirty and deep, there is a narrow path that goes around it's circumference. There's no fence or guardrail to stop you falling in, and the pond had sheer edges that go straight down into its abyss like a cliff, but even though it was a bright and sunny day there were no boats to watch.

I bounce my bike up and down and cycle around in circles for a bit, and then I have an idea for a new bike game.

ME: I know, let's play a dare game!

JACK: OK,

TOBY: Yeah!

ME: Put two empty soda cans out of that waste bin close together here on the path, then you must steer around them with your front wheel, and drive through them on your bike with only your back wheel. We put these cans closer and closer together until someone knocks one of them over and your out, and then it's between the last two of us, and the winner decides the dare for the other two.

Jack and Toby agree.

We flip coins to decide who will go first and second and start the competition. I am last and spend my waiting time bouncing up and down on my bike. The bouncing seems to be getting bouncier for some reason. Then it's my turn, the cans get moved closer together and we all take turns to go again.

Now it's my turn, and just before I go through the pair of cans on the boating pond path, I bounce the bike up and down first for fun. As I look down to make sure my back wheel is aligned to go through the pair of cans there is a pinging noise coming from near my knees.

I look down and can see and feel the bike frame coming apart, I lean back, and the bike frame comes apart in two pieces.

I am holding the handlebars and front wheel about a foot to my left instead of directly in front of me, I have no control and no experience of my new mono cycle, and of course have no brakes as I cycle off the boating ponds rounded concrete edge and into the deep dirty water that had foul smelling mud in the bottom as I discovered.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEVIL HOLE

Its late summer, and the grass in Greenwich park has long gone yellow now. This grass is now ideal for sliding down on if you also have a hill. All you need is a piece of cardboard box to slide down on. We go to the local newsagents and sneak around the back and get some old empty crisp boxes from the rubbish pile.

As we start to walk towards Greenwich park we go up "Blisset Street", and pass Greenwich fire station where next to the station there used to be an engineers and car wreckers' yard.

Since this site had been vacated, we had been in the yard many times. There had never been much in there to play with, and fencing had been put up around the site for the last year.

But recently the old fencing had been taken down and new bigger fencing put up, and now heavy machinery like bulldozers and tippers were digging the ground up on the old site.

There were poorly fitting gates at the entrance, so we all squeezed through the gate opening to see what was going on as we were passing by.

To our amazement we came across a big wide hole in the ground. When we looked down this hole, we could see that it was lined with bricks that looked like a train tunnel. We all peered down the hole for quite a while.

ME: Look, you can see that bulldozers tracks going across the hole, I bet that made the roof collapse, looks like a train tunnel,

JACK: Yeah! It looks like that bulldozer fell in almost,

TOBY: I didn't know trains went along here, the station is over a mile away, I wonder if we can get down there,

ME: I bet there is a ladder around someplace,

JACK: Lets come back later and have a look,

We all squeeze back out though the gate and make our way to Greenwich park.

We spend around an hour sliding down a grassy slope near the café in the park until we get told off by a parkkeeper for ruining the grass and making it flat and worn out, which it was anyway before we had turned up.

We wander off towards the large open grassy area of the park which is near to the Greenwich Maritime Museum.

TOBY: What's that big tent there for?

ME: Dunno?

JACK: It's the concert,

ME: What concert?

JACK: Mum told me there is a concert band playing music for people who sit in that big tent thing,

The huge tarpaulin tent is open on one side with terraced seating inside like you would find in a cinema. Its roof slopes back a few degrees and the frame is made from scaffold tube.

All the green tarpaulin is tied down to the framework with rope throughout.

It's about 8 meters high and around 40 meters long, the seats go back around 20 rows. It faces a slope where a concert band performs at night.

A metal barrier fence surround's the area with appropriate signs of "**Security monitor this area, keep out, do not climb**",

To us this was just a big climbing frame, the metal barrier fence was nothing more than an obstacle in our way.

But, the sign to us reads, "**Welcome! Come on in for free, and have the time of your life, Excitement! Fun! Thrills!**"

And so, we did..

We all went off in different directions to start running around on the tents framework. Jack went left I went straight ahead and up some stairs to the back, and Toby went right.

We started playing tag for a while, running along the seats of chairs, then slowing walking across the chair backs rather than using the stairs, eventually running across the chair backs when we were more confident.

We were playing Tag, and I was it. I was chasing after Jack when he started climbing a vertical scaffold pole, I followed him up the pole. He had got through an opening in the tarpaulin roof. When I got onto the roof through the same hole, I saw that Toby had joined us on the roof as well.

I had just started to chase Jack again when we all herd some shouting. We all walked to the edge and saw a couple of policemen who were looking up at us and yelling.

POLICEMAN: COME DOWN, ALL OF YOU, RIGHT NOW!

Toby waves and shouts down to the police,

TOBY: OK THEN!

Me and Toby decided that the best thing to do was run, so we ran in the opposite direction of the police, while I see Jack go back the way he had come.

Toby must had been around six meters in front of me, it was hard going running on the tarpaulin as every time you stepped on the roof it sunk down and you had to step up.

I could see that Toby was having the same problem, but he seemed to be sinking further and further, eventually he vanishes into the roof like he is being sucked downwards.

I could see the tarpaulin being pulled across the scaffolding frame as he sunk out of site.

I got to where Toby had been and stood at the edge and looked down, the tarpaulin had formed into long slide to the bottom, I saw Toby scramble out. I jumped into the "V" shape that had been created in the tarpaulin and slid down to the bottom onto the chairs.

I saw Toby climbing the metal fence and followed him running up a grassy slope and into some bushes.

ME: You seen Jack?

TOBY: No

From inside the bushes we see the policemen take a careful look around the area before getting in their police car and drive off across the grass.

ME: Come on let's go,

We both cautiously walk back to the big tent and look around,

JACK: Hey, you two, look what I found!

TOBY: You made me fucking jump Jack!

ME: Where you been?

JACK: I hid behind the tarp, in the space under the frame, which is underneath the seating, there's a box in there with these brochures about the concert, and these yellow vests the ushers must wear when they show people to their seats with these torches. Look! Torches!

TOBY: Torches for that train hole!

ME: Do they work,

JACK: Yeah! A bit, sorter of,

We make our way back to the old car wreckers' site with the train tunnel hole, we find a wooden builders ladder laying on the back of a trailer and drop it down the hole.

The ladder goes down the hole about four meters. We put on the Ushers, "I am here to answer your questions" that is written on the back of the yellow vests on, turn our torches on and climb down the ladder.

Jacks torch seems to be brightest, while mine and Toby's torches give off light like candles in brown beer bottles.

The ground at the bottom of the tunnel is covered in bricks and goes up about a third of the way to the top of the tunnel. You could tell it was a train tunnel by its shape and the walls were covered in soot from what must had been from Smokey steams engines some decades ago.

We shone our torches up and down the tunnel, but could not see either end, we all decided to go east. It was hard work walking over these bricks, they were loose, and you kept bending your ankles awkwardly.

It seemed like a long time had passed when we got to the end, it was very hot in the tunnel, and we were all sweating buckets.

At the end of the tunnel was a brick wall from top to bottom with a few bricks knocked out near the top. We piled some bricks up to stand on and shone Jacks torch though the hole.

We all took turns to look, but all you could see was what looked like old rusty industrial machines, and another brick wall. It was not what we had expected to see, it was strange?

We sat down for a while and looked back down the tunnel. We had walked for some distance, and you could just see the light from the hole in the roof at the other end, and it looked like it was a long way away.

As we made our way back we all started to get headaches, and all felt sick, we realised that the air was thin, and to make things worse mine and Toby's torches had given up, while the output from Jacks torch was getting fairly poor now.

We decided to get back as quick as we could. We found ourselves short on breath and gasping for air, eventually crawling across the bricks.

We got back to the entrance and out of the tunnel, then went straight over to a working water tap we had found earlier and quenched our thirsts. We could have died and not been found in that tunnel. Adventure over, we all decided not to go back.

CHAPTER 3

A DANCE WITH A HOT GIRL, BUT I GOT THE HOT BUM

We were nearly in our teens now, and we started to hang out as a larger group of friends with girls. I never thought of us as a gang really, but it was.

As we all got older, we did more adult recreational things, like go swimming, or go out for the day someplace, and almost always we would all have differing opinions of what to do next or where to go.

Sometimes we all split up into smaller groups because the girls that started hanging around us wanted to go to look at clothes in shops, and the boys simply didn't want to do that.

During the summer we would all go to Charlton swimming lido. And go to Ladywell indoor heated baths in Lewisham during the wintertime.

But a good alternative was Greenwich swimming baths. The swimming pool and buildings were really old and still had the

original big iron bathtubs and other facilities from the 1930's.

It never got really busy there, because it was very dated, but for our gang that had little money it was good, and it was cheap enough just to go there and cool off.

During the wintertime there was no pool heating at Greenwich baths, so the pool was covered over with wood like a ballroom floor to make it into a skating ring for Roller Skating.

You could hire skates there very cheaply, but you had to get there early, or you couldn't get your own size, and then have to get a shoe size skate two sizes too big.

At one point we had all tried smoking, and there was always someone with a cigarette or two that had been "borrowed" from their Mum or Dads packet of 20 ciggies.

There was always someone who could supply a match to light the shared around cigarette.

I favoured Swan Vesta Redhead Matches, as these were not like regular safety matches that needed the special surface on the side of the matchbox required to strike the match. You could ignite these Redhead matches on any rough surface. I had several of these matches in my back pocket this evening.

Me and Mike were meeting the rest of our roller-skating demolition team buddies outside Greenwich Baths that evening.

As we walked along the pavement towards the baths, we could see the gang sitting down on the steps outside, just waiting for us two to turn up so we could all go in together.

Four boys and four girls all push and shove at the skate counter to get the best skates. The best skates were ones that had round wheels rather than the damaged square wheeled ones that had massive flat spots on them that clanked and wobbled when you skated on them.

So why were the roller skates damaged like that? I will tell all later!

The boys all knew the girls from school, and they all lived close by. The girls started going roller skating the same time as we did.

The girls all skated together in pairs like you would if you were a grown-up man and women. And the boys... well, we just fucked about, until one day we realised that there was a prize for the best pair of "artistic skaters".

At the time there was a prize of a single (a 45) pop record of your choice from the current top 10 in the pop record charts.

On discovering that a prize could be won for winning a skating competition immediately stopped us boys goofing around. We started doing some serious roller skating and dancing techniques, we observed each other and tried to do better.

As boys would, we ended up chasing each other around the ring and skid the skates across the wooden surface hard into the corners trying to knock each other over. But this stopped the wheels on the skates turning and wore a big flat spot on the skate's plastic wheels.

Next thing you knew as you skated around your leg was vibrating like you had a trapped nerve in your knee, and everyone was looking around to see who was making an echoing drum roll noise across the echoing wooden flooring caused by your skates wheels flat spots, and this fucked up the skates badly.

One of the girls called Nikki grabbed my hand as I was skating around, she was in the year above me at school. She was tall with dark hair, pretty, and a good skater.

NIKKI: Look, Leo! if we win the competition my Mum said she will get me my own skates, and you can have the pop record,

ME: I don't have a record player,

NIKKI: Well sell the record! or get a record player then!

I think, Fuck! I must be stupid; I could sell it or get a record player!

ME: Ok!

NIKKI: I'll show you some moves, and you copy me,

She does some pirouettes and then does some crossed over leg moves,

ME: Fuck off, I can't do that!

NIKKI: Don't swear, how are we going to win then?

ME: Why don't you do all that stuff, and I just hold your hand and move from your left side to your right side?

NIKKI: Ok, that might work,

ME: And I get to choose the Boogie nights single by Heatwave if we win,

NIKKI: OK,

We practice openly on the skating ring to all my mate's disbelief as they watch us pass by again and again continually improving our technique. It's then announced over the speakers that the competition will start, and we all have to get ready with our partners.

I see my gang sitting down around the skating ring outskirts, they are amongst the other observers who had decided not to take part, but to watch instead that night.

A dozen pairs of competitors join me and Nikki to take our places on the roller-skating floor, and the pop music "Booker T. & The MG's - Time Is Tight" starts.

It starts off good and we seem to rule the floor, or at least Nikki does, I just move across behind her, back and forth, back and forth.

We seem to be doing well, I can see the other competitors looking around and giving us dirty looks, good! But just as the music comes to an end, she unexpectedly grabs both my hands and spins herself and me around fast and then lets me go.

As I travel backwards across the roller-skating ballroom floor unable to stop, and onwards to an unknown oblivion, I briefly look right.

I see all my mates standing in a line looking at me with surprised expressions on their faces as I pass them by in reverse, with both my arms outstretched.

As my unplanned and reversed journey continues, I see all my mate's heads turn around to look at Nikki, I see them all raising their hands and start clapping and woof whistling at her.

Still traveling backwards at an unreasonable speed, I suddenly trip-up and slam down onto my bum and skid to a halt, where the collection of swan vesta matches self-combust and ignite. The red head matches had burst into flames in my back pocket.

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