

HOMeward BOUND TO OZ

THE ADVENTURES OF KEN SAUNDERS



HOMEWARD BOUND TO OZ THE ADVENTURES OF KEN SAUNDERS

Who came to Australia to seek his fortune. He hasn't found it yet but has had a lot of fun looking.

This story is firstly for Georgie, my wife and mate who has supported me and encouraged me to write this story. Also for my family, Linda, Wendy, Martin, Ryan, James, Liam and all my Aussie mates.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed living it.

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EARLY DAYS

Like a lot of kids I didn't like my first day at school, Mum walked me to Mrs White's private school before she went to work, and I let everyone know I didn't want to go. We had only just moved from Deptford London to our new home in West Drayton which is about 30 miles from London. I can't remember too much about Mrs White except that she seemed very tall she wore a long black dress and she carried a cane which she always kept where we could see it. From there I progressed to the proper school with all the other five year olds, where learning began in earnest, football (soccer) was one of the major priorities, I liked that. When I was seven the Second World War broke out and that was fun for a seven year old, spending most of our school days in the air-raid shelter got us out of lot of school work, a fact I regretted in later life. My Dad was working as a metal polisher in a factory that made aircraft parts so he didn't go into the army ,his work was considered to be essential to the war effort. He was a lovely person my Dad, a real cockney. I loved my Dad even though he seemed to mix with some rather shady characters. I remember one night the piano had to be moved, the floorboards raised and some goods were placed under the floor. I never found out what it was, but Dad never seemed to be short of a drop of scotch. None of our family could play the piano but occasionally Dad would invite someone home who could play and we would have a good old sing along. One of the few regrets I have is that I never learnt to play the Piano,

Despite the fact that Mum sent me for lessons. Which I invariably missed to go and play football with my mates down the park. My sister Jean made her appearance in the world at this time. I remember she was born at home which caused a lot of excitement for the grown ups. Everyone reckoned my nose would be out of joint, I kept checking my nose but it didn't seem to grow any different, so I thought they didn't know what they were talking about.

Mum had a little dry cleaning agency shop, and Dad helped out by delivering the bag wash to the customers. Bag wash was a means of the working Mum getting her washing done very cheaply -about three shillings for the whole wash. On occasions Dad was given a pig which had been illegally killed by one of his farmer mates. Dad would place the pig on the kitchen table and proceed to butcher it. The result being that some of the favoured bag wash customers would get a bonus with their washing, at a small extra charge. Of course.

My Grandad on Mums side was an excellent carpenter; he and my Grandmother lived in a little cottage on the edge of a canal that ran between West Drayton and Yiewsley. He converted one of the bedrooms into his workshop and in that workshop he made the counters for Mums shop, he wheeled them in his wheelbarrow up to the shop and installed them. He also made toys which he used to wheel around the shops in Yiewsley trying to sell them to the shop owners, and he was well into his seventies, a wonderful old man. Unfortunately none of his craftsmanship rubbed off on me. I liked to visit Grandad's cottage often because as he lived right next to the canal I could take my fishing rod down there and do some fishing. We used bread as bait and surprisingly I was able to catch the odd fish, nearly always too small to eat but I would still take them home to show Mum. It was always interesting to see the barges go by being pulled by a big horse. Those horses seemed so big to me, I would always get well off the track

when they came by. The barges were painted with very bright colours. Grandma told me never to talk to the people on the barges, so I was always a little frightened of them. This was a shame. I am sure they were very interesting and nice people. One day I caught this huge fish -well to me it was huge. I was so excited I raced into Grandad; he said it was very nice now go and throw it back to its mummy. I was going to put it in my bag and sneak it home to show Mum but Grandad must have read my mind. He came outside and watched me throw it back. Anytime I caught a fish after that I never told him. If anyone came into the shop and wanted shirts laundered Mum would send the shirts with the bag wash then when they came back she would iron them in the little room she had upstairs, no one ever knew the difference. Mums shop seemed to be going very well but it kept her very busy and when she got home late at night she was so tired, even at that tender age I used to worry about my Mum.

Dad got me a job helping the milk lady on the milk cart; it was the only job I ever got the sack from. On about the second or third day she asked me to move the horse and cart a little further up the road. I got the horse by the bridle and pulled him forward, not leaving enough room to get past a parked car. Of course we scraped the car and she went off her brain and told me to go home in no uncertain tones. My next job was delivering newspapers before school. It was a good job although I wasn't very keen on getting up so early, especially in winter, but the money was good for a little kid.

I liked Sunday mornings because I was given a whole lot of papers to take down to the Air Force camp to sell. There were a lot of American Airman stationed there and they always had plenty of chewing gum. Any extra gum I had left on Monday I could swap for cigarette cards with the other boys at school. The war was hotting up and Hitler's boys were throwing everything at London. It must have been terrible for our parents. Mum made up a bed for my sister and me under

the stairs that was considered to be the safest place in the house. We kids thought it was great after an air-raid to go out and pick up pieces of shrapnel from the bombs. We collected them and compared them at school the next day. One of the houses around the corner got hit by a bomb, no one was hurt, and luckily everyone was down the shelter. The Germans must have been looking for the Air-Force camp and were a little off course. It was good for us kids -there was plenty of shrapnel to collect. Things were going OK at school, in between air raids we managed to get a few games of soccer in and the teacher made me captain of the house team which carried a certain amount of prestige (I later found out that he was a drinking mate of Dads) . After school we used to go down the common and play football. We used coats and jumpers as goal posts and we had some great games. I was getting a bit of a reputation as a goalkeeper this news must have reached Dad because he decided to give up some of his darts/drinking time to come and watch me play one day. He got our little van out put my sister in the front seat beside him and drove down to the common. Unfortunately the passenger door wasn't closed properly and when he turned a corner Jean fell out. Fortunately she wasn't badly hurt but Dad never ever came to see me play again. My mate Billy Christmas who lived next door was very keen on photography and he also heard that I would soon be playing for England in Goal (I think I told him), so he brought his camera down to the common to take my photo. We arranged that the first goal kick I took he would take the picture. The big moment arrived, Billy lined up the camera I lined up the ball, completely missed it and fell on my backside. Everyone thought it was funny, except me. Another game we liked to play was conkers, a very hard game to explain. Firstly you had to find a tree with nuts on it which we knew as conkers. You drilled a hole in the nut with one of Mums meat skewers, put a piece of string through the hole and tied a knot. You were then ready to challenge another boy

to a game of conkers. The opposition would hold their conker out for you to try and belt it with your conker you each took a turn until one was broken. The boy with the conker still in tact was the winner and could then challenge someone else. We got a bit cunning with this we found that by baking the conker nut in Mums oven it would become as hard as cement and very hard to break. One of my baked conkers had seventy five victories before it finally succumbed. Scrumping was another favourite pastime, there was an apple orchard just down the road from our place and when the trees were full we used to raid them. There was a team of six of us boys. We would split up into two lots of three and climb trees on either side of the small orchard. When the farmer came out to chase us away he could only chase one lot of us, the other three would pick as many apples as they could, then run for it. We would then meet the other three, split up our haul and take them home to our Mums. Well organised and Mum never asked where we got them. Food was always a problem, we probably did a little better than some families because of Dads connections, but it was still tough. Mum used to make bread pudding. She would make huge trays of it I loved it .It certainly was a good filler. One day on the way to school I remembered that Mum had made a big bread pudding the day before. The temptation was too great for me. I turned around and ran back home, but the place was all locked up. I was so desperate that I broke the pantry window to get at it. I ate half of it and took some to school with me. On the way home from school I realised I was in big trouble so I did the right thing I confessed. I got a good wallop behind the ear and told that I would have to pay for the window out of my pocket money. On another occasion one of my mates had come upon five shillings, I think he nicked it. He spent it all on cough lollies and a packet of five woodbines. Being a good mate I helped him out we were both looking a bit green when we had finished them. The reason he bought cough lollies of course was that is all he could buy.

The shops didn't have ordinary lollies or ice cream or other lovely things that us kids yearned for.

Mum had to go to work before I left for school so I would have to go to Auntie Betty's place for breakfast. Auntie Betty lived just up the road next to the Cherry Tree Pub. All we got for breakfast every day was a bowl of porridge I hated it. I often complained that it was too hot, only to be told to eat the edges, to which I replied "I've already eaten the edges". I was now going to Cherry Tree Lane School, a brand new school, with brand new air raid shelters. The air raid shelters almost became our class rooms the teachers had a most difficult job to keep us under control. I was always in awe of the teachers; they seemed to have eyes in the back of their head. One teacher in particular, Miss Wilson would be writing on the blackboard and without turning around she knew it was me that was playing up. She would say "Kenny stop doing that" and I would think how did she see me. One day she sent me up to the Headmaster and without asking me what I had done wrong he got the stick out and gave me six of the best. I was a hero for a couple of days, but boy was my hand sore. I behaved myself for quite a while after that. We had mental arithmetic each morning to get us going. It was about the only subject I was any good at, mainly because of Dad. He used to encourage me to be good at it; his reason was that if you can add up the boss can't cheat you on pay day. There were two occasions I came home soaking wet and got into trouble. There was a gravel pit not far from home that was full of water. Extremely deep and extremely dangerous, it was like a magnet to us boys. We managed to get hold of some empty oil drums and we strapped them together and made a sort of raft out of them. We found an old door and used it as a deck. We then made a couple of oars out of pieces of wood and had a great time paddling around this big gravel pit. Another group of boys had done the same thing and we had races. Of course eventually there was a collision and a couple of us fell in, we were wet and cold. I ran home and

tried to sneak upstairs without Mum seeing me, to no avail I got a hiding and sent to bed without tea. I managed to pinch a jam sandwich later when no one was around. There was another occasion that really made Mum mad, but surprisingly not with me. Between our house and next door there was a narrow passageway and there was a Welsh family living next door who we didn't get on with. I was coming home from soccer one night and the kids were waiting in the upstairs room overlooking the alley, when I was directly under the window they emptied the family chamber pot over me, it was a good shot -not one drop of the stinking contents missed me. When Mum saw me she saw red, she raced in next door and really gave them a piece of her mind. Out came the old tin bath and I was given a thorough scrubbing. Mum gave me an extra big tea that night. I think it was one of the very few times that she gave me a cuddle. She really did love me but emotions were not shown in those days.

We had an air raid shelter delivered to us and we dug a big hole in the back yard and put this air raid shelter up. The first time it rained it filled up with water. We would have been safe from the bombs but we would have drowned. We never used that shelter in fact Dad pulled it down and filled the hole up again. The Doodle bugs or VI and VII were the worst. We could hear them coming then after the motor cut out we would wait for it to explode. Dad always said if you can hear them explode you are OK. I firmly believe that every Mum and Dad that brought kids up at that time should have all got a medal of some sort.

We had a bathroom at home but us kids very seldom used it. We had a tin bath which Mum would place in front of the kitchen fire and fill it up with hot water from the kettle. Not very private but nice and warm. It was a huge kitchen and most of our living was done in that room. The front room was only for Sundays or when we had visitors, it too was a large room with a three quarter size billiard table a piano and radiogram. Grandad Saunders was staying with us on and off.

I remember watching him playing Dad billiards one day and every time Dad turned to put his score up Grandad would knock the balls into the pocket with his hand and then claim the points. I'm sure Dad knew but let him get away with it. My Grandad fascinated me he would stand with his back to the fire and rock back and forwards with his eyes closed, I'm sure he went to sleep sometimes. On occasions he would turn and spit into the fire and watch it sizzle on the hot coals. Mum would really go mad at him if she caught him doing that. I liked Sundays! Mum would open up the front room and I was allowed to play records on the radiogram. Glen Miller was my favourite and we also had Ted Heath and Fats Waller. Every now and then Mum would poke her head around the corner and yell at me to turn the volume down a bit (nothing changes). Also on a Sunday evening Dad would bring some Perry Winkles home from the pub and Mum would give us a sewing needle each to get the winkles out of their shells to eat them, yum!

We had an allotment down on the council land, which was a small plot of ground where we could grow vegetables. I would go down with Dad and help him pull out the weeds and tend to the vegies. We were very proud of our allotment and we would have competitions with our neighbours to see who could grow the biggest onions or carrots. Dad nearly always won, he said he had green fingers which I didn't believe. They looked brown to me from all the cigarettes he smoked. The allotment was very close to the Cherry Tree pub and Dad would often sneak away for a quick pint. He wouldn't be away long and he would bring me back a packet of Smiths chips so that I wouldn't tell Mum. One day he must have had more than one pint because he had to have a wee. He did it near the onions and said we would win for sure this time, I watched them grow over the next few weeks, I thought he might be right, so every time I went down there I gave them a little fertilising of my own.

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