



PARALLEL PATHS

by Peter Waddington



Preface – I wrote this some years back fully intending to publish it as a book but later decided not to do this because I knew there were far too few people that would be prepared to buy it.

It practically is a story of my life from birth to Koi and beyond. I'll warn you in advance that it is a long read.

Chapter 1

Alexander Crescent in Burley, Leeds, Yorkshire was my first home.

I was a 'war baby' born July 1943, my mum Minnie, had 6 brothers & sisters, she worked as a bus conductress during the war.

My dad Rhodes, had 8 brothers/sisters, pre-war he worked at Melbourne Brewery and volunteered to serve in the army. He ended up as an infantryman in the Royal Scots Fusiliers. He was wounded in Holland by shrapnel and had 27 operations, which left him with a severe hole in his shoulder.

Uncle Joey, was our next door neighbour – I can hardly remember him at all now.

Our home was a terraced house – we all lived in terraced houses back then.

I was walking by 18 months old but suddenly stopped walking at two and a half years old for reasons unknown to my parents. The GP & the Infirmary said I was just a lazy boy!

In the meantime we had moved home to Raynville Road, Bramley, in Leeds to live in my Uncle Bill's own house and Mum was employed to take care of the house for my Uncle who had just been divorced.



At 4 years old I was still not walking, our next door neighbour Mrs. Pickles, who was a strict vegetarian, suggested an Osteopath. Dad took me to see one in Bradford and the Osteopath confirmed that I had a fractured spine with TB already set in. He said he could cure me in 6 months but the cost would be £500.00 (a good new house back then was £400.00 – my parents could not possibly afford it!)

I was taken back to Leeds Infirmary & the doctor (Mr. Payne!) agreed with the diagnosis of the Osteopath but told Dad it would take at least four years to effect a cure. Dad went back home without me & told Mum I'd be in hospital for 6 months – she broke down!



Dad was working again at the Melbourne Brewery in Leeds and I was in Pinderfields Hospital near Wakefield laid horizontally in a full body cast. Soon afterwards I got a perforated eardrum & went on the critical list! I recovered but in total I was in hospital for over four and a half years. As I grew I had to be given new body casts. Mum & Dad visited me 3 times every week throughout despite the long bus journeys involved!

I had no education at all in hospital – only the radio & I listened to music for most of the time. When I returned home at eight and a half years old I had to wear a spinal corset for 3 years, I couldn't read or write or even tell the time.

My sister Carole, two years younger, and I became close friends, the post-war years meant we had to keep chickens in the back yard if we wanted luxuries like eggs.

I went to Potternewton physically handicapped school for 18 months and then to a County Primary school. On the first day, the Headmaster introduced me at assembly as 'brave boy' who needed real care and support from all the other pupils. By lunchtime my head had been pushed through the steel railings surrounding the school and the fire brigade was called out to free me. So much for 'care and support'!

At home we had radiogram – Dad was into music. There were 78rpm records by Benny Goodman; Artie Shaw; Dorsey Brothers; Jan August, Hoagy Carmichael; Andrews Sisters; Ink Spots; Spike Jones; Mills Brothers and many others – I listened to everything, learned all the words and sang them out loud to myself in the toilet - much to the annoyance of my family.

Dad also recalled many stories of his war exploits in the early evenings – Carole & I were totally fascinated. He also told us stories of a German Luger he had in a metal box in the wardrobe. One day when I was alone in the house I found the locked metal box and it was heavy but I never, ever saw the Luger. He did, however, have a German long knife in its scabbard which he gave me one day.

Uncle Bill found a new wife a few years afterwards so we had to move out of his home. We then found a brand new council house about 2 miles away. I took the 11 plus exam at the age of 12 & my headmaster came in person to see me and tell me that I'd passed my 11 plus & could actually go to high school. Mum and Dad were ecstatic.

I chose Cockburn High School (brown & gold uniform) for boys & girls and had to take three buses each way to get there.

I then took up coarse fishing which was to become a serious pastime of mine for many years. I also became quite fast in speed swimming and later became school champion.



I stayed in 'C' grade throughout High School & had a superb time there. Glen Baxter was in my class (he's now very famous world-wide as an avant-garde cartoon artist) - he heard me singing & mentioned that he played piano. He asked me to go to his home & we'd sing & play Fats Domino and other popular rock'n'roll songs that were fascinating us both. Within 3 months we had formed a skiffle-type group with three other guys from our class and called ourselves 'The 5C Squares'.

At home I had a nearby friend whose elder brother was in the Merchant Navy. He brought home American music records of the day from the USA by people such as Slim Whitman; Hank Williams; Guy Mitchell, Bill Haley and others which we listened to whenever we could. I joined a youth club which opened on Monday, Tuesday & Thursday evenings where we could play games & jive to the sounds of rock'n'roll music which was getting into my blood!

A girl at the youth club had a brother who bought EVERY USA 45rpm single released in the UK and he loaned her them to bring to the youth club. She allowed me to borrow them from Tuesday night until Thursday night and I just listened all Wednesday night to them on our new 'Dansette' auto-change record player.

This was when I realised that this music was incredible, the 'dirty guitar sounds' fascinated me – Carl Perkins' 'Matchbox/Blue Suede Shoes'; Presley's 'Mystery Train/Hound Dog'; Chuck Berry 'Johnny B. Goode'; Everly Brothers 'Wake up little Susie'; Buddy Holly 'Rave On'; Eddie Cochran '20 Flight Rock' and all the USA classics of the day. I did have one or two UK artists I listened to like Lonnie Donegan whose influences all came from earlier USA songsmiths like Woody Guthrie and others but, for the most part, my dreams all revolved around the USA giants.

I worked at my Uncle Walter's toy shop on Saturdays for two shillings and sixpence. After I'd finished there, on Saturday evenings I started selling Sport Final newspapers in Leeds City centre, my 'pitch' was right outside the door of the biggest bookmaker in Leeds.

One of my regular buyers always gave me a two and sixpence tip – I often earned nearly two pounds a night! All the money earned was spent on records which I treasured – I knew them all by heart!

The other major interest I've always had was coarse fishing and I have spent many a happy day on the rivers of the Yorkshire Dales. My favourite river was the Ure at Boroughbridge where I would spend days wading in the water and 'trotting' a float via a centre pin reel down the stream to catch Dace, Chub, Roach and Barbel. My favourite coarse fish has always been the barbel, my largest was only just over five pounds in weight but I can still recall the thrill of the battle in landing it!

When I had just turned sixteen years old I entered the annual 'Juvenile Angling Competition' on the Leeds and Liverpool canal. There were over 400 entrants and the canal banks were pegged out for a few miles. I drew a very good peg opposite the by-wash of a canal lock and we all started fishing when the whistle blew at 2.00pm.

My teacher back then was a Mr. Creasey who lived near to me and he sat next to me watching the float. On two occasions he chastised me for missing bites, soon Dad came along and stood next to us. No one was catching fish that day on our stretch; Dad was chewing peanuts at the time and threw some half-eaten ones near my float.

Two minutes later the float dipped and I landed a four and a half ounce roach which went straight into my keep net. As the final whistle blew I watched the others packing up their tackle but Mr. Creasey told me to wait for the weighing-in team.

The long and short of it all was that I had won the match and soon became surrounded by newspaper reporters and staff from angling publications. Photographs were taken and I had to give interviews with Dad looking on proudly.

The award presentation was to be the following Thursday evening at the Leeds Angler's Club near the town centre. Dad came along and the place was heaving, we sat down and

discussed angling with many other anglers there and the beer started flowing. Dad sneaked me a half of bitter and began to enjoy the evening. I cannot now recall exactly what prizes I received but it was more than enough to kit out five anglers completely. I asked Dad if we could get back home but he just said 'You go son, I'll follow you shortly'. I got home to show Mum my treasured prizes but all she could say to me was 'Where's your Dad?'

I went to bed that night a very happy boy but was wakened around 2.00am with my Mum's voice screaming 'You drunken Sod, you're still going to work at 6.00am today!' I saw Dad that night at tea time – he looked poorly but not a word was spoken. That's the only time I can ever recall my Dad being drunk!

The first concert given by the 5C Squares was at the school Christmas party. We played Cliff Richard's 'Living Doll'. I got bloody fingers because I could not play the guitar, but needed a 'crutch' to hold on to as lead singer – and also to look good to the girls who were also beginning to grab my attention. So there was more to life than football and cricket?

After our debut, the schools choirmaster came over and said 'So that's why I have never seen you at choir practice Waddington.' I never really understood his statement.

Chapter 2

The Music

Then followed a memorable rock'n'roll concert at Leeds Empire with Joe Brown, Don Lang, Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent in person. I think that concert changed my life at the time – I was going to be the next Elvis! Television was also important to me by way of the legendary programme every Saturday evening called 'The Six-Five Special' – I never missed a single one.

Every year we would go for holidays to Blackpool, Carole & myself could hardly wait for the time to come to get on the coach which took us from Leeds to Skipton to Gisburn to Preston and then the last leg to Blackpool. We stayed near the South Shore at a boarding house on Dean Street. Right opposite our digs was Bob's Café – a magical place that had pin ball machines and, most importantly, a jukebox.

My spending money was divided equally between the pleasure beach and that jukebox with endless cups of coffee whilst I listened. I first heard many songs for the first time there including Orbison's 'Only The Lonely' and Johnny Bond's 'Hot Rod Jalopy', it was always the words to the songs that hooked me first and my imagination would run wild.

**'The fenders clicking the guard-rail post and my gal beside me
white as a ghost'**

Despite my new-found love of rock'n'roll, I still managed to get four GCE's including Maths and English which were very important in those days in order to get a decent job. I also got a free scholarship along with Glen Baxter (mentioned earlier) to the famous Slade Art College in London. This free scholarship was a dream to many of us as only two were awarded annually from all the schools in Leeds. It was also the first time that two classmates received the award.



My parents tried to see if they could possibly afford to pay my living expenses there but there was no chance of that. Glen's parents managed though and he went on to greater things with a combination of his artistic talent and wry humour.

My parents need me to get a full time job to 'earn my keep'. I applied for many over the following six months after leaving school. I finally got an interview in central Leeds at the offices of Esso Petroleum. Dad came along with me for the interview and it was he who really got me a job. (The entire interview was merely a recollection of wartime experiences shared between Dad and Mr. Binns – the office manager.)

At Esso Petroleum I was the new office boy on a good wage of six pounds and four shillings a week, I gave my wage to Mum every Friday and she gave me back £2.00 a week for spends. I was later promoted to 'clerk to the home heating and agricultural manager' after two years at a new wage of nine pounds a week. I even signed on at night school for two nights a week to learn about economics and business studies.

However, in the evenings, I played in several Leeds bands as lead singer. The pub scene began to come alive after rock'n'roll music replaced the solo singers and pianists emulating Sinatra, Como, Cole, Bennett and others.

'Roll over Beethoven, dig these rhythm & blues'.

'The Comancheros' were the first real band I fronted and we played to large pub audiences that were not only formed by local customers but also many other guys in the local music scene. There were many there just checking us all out, on many nights it became almost like an endless audition.

On our nights off we would also go to see other groups that were grabbing some of the latest attention. There were several pubs in the same area of Leeds that were hallowed grounds for young rock'n'roll groups and many were in walking distance of each other. If a group was no good in one pub we'd walk to the next and so on. A mental list was formed in our heads as to the best singer; the best lead guitarist, the best rhythm guitarist; the best bass player and the best drummer. These would all be upstaged monthly as new talent came onto the scene constantly.

The guys in our band had their own amplification but I had to put up with the crappy house P.A. systems with Reslo microphones that failed constantly and always at the worst possible time in a song.

Dad would come some nights to see us and I often complained to him that I needed my own P.A. system. After listening to my constant moans for a few months he asked me what I needed. I told him I wanted the German-made 'Dynacord' 200 watt P.A. system with a 'Shure' microphone from the USA and a 'Binson Echorec' unit – the total cost was £2,150.00.

You could buy a new luxury home back then for £1,800.00! To this day I have no idea how Dad did it but soon afterwards we were both in Scheerer's music store on North Street where Dad signed the first HP agreement he had ever signed in his life – Mum went mad with him for weeks! Six weeks later I picked up my new system in a friend's van, took it to a hall we rehearsed in and set it up. Stunning was not the word – it was far more than just that because Waddy now had his very own gear!

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model Jaguar! ”

The difference at live shows was enormous and many local groups came to see us and marvel at the Dynacord system which had them all green with envy. Soon afterwards I had all the controls sussed out to get the best out of my voice. Not long afterwards an older guy in the audience called me over for a private word. I sat next to him and listened. He told me he managed the finest band in Yorkshire and he needed me as the lead singer.

I was beginning to get a little 'streetwise' by then so I replied by saying - 'Oh yeah, if they are so good, what kind of guitars do they have then?'

He replied by quietly saying – 'Two Fender Strats and one Fender Precision bass – all in pink with three Vox AC30 amps – all brand new.'

I just stared at him with my mouth wide open – that statement, to a starry-eyed young lead singer, was just like telling a homeless person that he'd won the major prize on the football pools!

He then produced a colour photograph of the band with all their equipment as proof whilst I just stared at the photo in total disbelief. I had already seen several genuine Fender Stratocasters before but only one in this group and another in another group. I had never seen a group who had three of these sought-after beasts whose shape was a damned good second best to that of the current Miss World – and, in my opinion, at the time – even better!

Back then, every guitarist for miles around would sell their souls for a pink Fender Strat!

He then added, just for good measure, – 'By the way, we drive to gigs in a brand new, white Commer van.'

To a working rock group, that van was far more desirable than the latest model Jaguar!

After a short meeting with the group and an audition, I joined them and started immediately with a full booking list for pubs and working men's clubs. My new manager decided to call me Ray Vance and we went out under the name of 'Ray Vance and the Crusaders'. We were playing popular soft rock'n'roll music together with versions of standard songs like 'Over the Rainbow'; 'Summertime' and similar songs tailored for working men's clubs.

We had a Thursday night residency at the roughest and hardest pub in Leeds called The Hussars. It was an enormous place right in the centre of Leeds that catered for the drinking man and his ladies where brawls were not uncommon – especially if the ladies were involved. Thursdays became a popular night when it was hard to get a seat, in those places very hard waiters were employed to serve the tables. One evening before the show, our manager came over and handed me a large bag. I opened it to find a silver lurex jacket and a very lengthy lead for a microphone, he then asked me to wear the jacket from now on and to walk over to tables after the audience had a few drinks inside them and then sing love songs to selected ladies.

In my mind that could only lead to a smashed bottle in my face but, when one is on the road to definite stardom, a few risks must be taken!

“ Whilst we could get £25.00 per performance on Friday noon and night; Saturday noon and night and Sunday night (total £125.00 – in those times a solicitor dreamed of a £20.00 per week salary!) – that was not where I wanted to end up at all. ”

I tried it out a few times without any problems but never had any aspirations of being a night club performer – I was a rocker! Back then I had no love of the current UK music – everything that influenced me came from the USA. A few months of playing at huge miner's welfare clubs around Doncaster confirmed that to me. Whilst we could get £25.00 per performance on Friday noon and night; Saturday noon and night and Sunday night (total £125.00 – in those times a solicitor dreamed of a £20.00 per week salary!) – that was not where I wanted to end up at all.

That same year, my parents allowed me to go to Blackpool without them for the first time. Some local friends Billy Kneeshaw and Derek Haig also came along and we'd booked digs in central Blackpool. I was seventeen years old but they were both 18 and we'd taken our sharpest clothes with us. I had a pair of black drainpipe jeans that mum and dad didn't know about (I was not allowed to wear jeans) – weeks before we left for Blackpool I had taken a warm bath wearing my jeans at Derek's house and let them soak to my legs. I eventually rolled them off my legs and Derek got his Mum to dry them and iron them. Days later I picked them up and put them on with difficulty, next thing to do was to run around in them and stretch them a little before brushing on black shoe polish and rubbing it on the area between my thighs and knees to make them look shiny and well-worn!

That holiday introduced me to the start of the 'grown-up' world; we spent many evenings in the Huntsman pub where I was first introduced to pints of 'black velvet' – a mixture of 50% Guinness and 50% cider. On the first night I had three pints and it tasted delicious.

I recall little of leaving the pub that night but will always remember waking up on the beach at 5.30am with sea water lapping up to my knees. I stood up very slowly to find my prized winkle picker shoes ruined and my made to measure three-piece, shadow check, three-button Italian suit had tidemarks around the legs. I eventually found my way to the digs to find them locked so I fell back to sleep on the doorstep. The landlady found me when she was collecting the milk, she told me to go to bed but leave her my shoes and trousers. At 6.00pm she handed me my shiny shoes back and a perfect pair of trousers after scolding me severely. That same night I met a particularly attractive blonde lady from Sheffield but that's another story.

Back home, after few months later, I mentioned to our lead guitar player and bassist that I needed to sing less 'schmaltzy' stuff and move on. Small rock venues were springing up all over the UK, one of the best Leeds groups, 'The Cherokees', had 'turned professional' and were already making a living in London and that's where I really wanted to be.

After a few months The Crusaders disbanded, the bass player joined another group and that left a guitarist and myself. We both went to the important pubs and clubs around Leeds and gave out the word we were looking for players to join us.

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Within three months we were back on the road as a five piece group named ‘The Dawnbreakers’ with a totally new music which was a mixture of Chuck Berry; Jimmy Reed; Bo Diddley; Johnny Otis and other USA idols we had at the time.

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By then, there was a rock group on just about every street in Leeds – all we had to do was to find the best of them so we went, watched and listened.

Within three months we were back on the road as a five piece group named ‘The Dawnbreakers’ with a totally new music which was a mixture of Chuck Berry; Jimmy Reed; Bo Diddley; Johnny Otis and other USA idols we had at the time.

We still played the working men’s clubs for the money but many of the concert secretaries (the people who made all the decisions) did not give us further bookings as we were not, in their opinion, ‘commercial enough’ – we were also ‘far too loud’. We knew we’d have to break into the large ballroom (Mecca) and rock club scene if we were to survive.

To attempt to do this, in 1962 we signed with a Bradford-based company called The Don Read Agency who advertised us as an ‘R&B band’. Very soon we started to get bookings farther afield from our usual territories and were often booked for six nights a week. Three of the group packed in their day jobs but two of us still kept ours. I would often fall asleep at my desk at work but thankfully there were others covering for me.

We were later advised of auditions that were to be held in Bradford for summer work at Butlin’s Holiday camps. ‘Butlins’ was huge in those days and they had vacancies for dance bands, bar bands and bands for the ‘rock ballroom’. The rock ballroom was where we wanted to play, we had dreams of being able to set our equipment up just once and leave it there for 16 weeks or more.

We were also very well aware that there would be an endless coming and going of many very attractive young ladies!

Before we went to the audition we were told that we had to perform two songs, one being fast-tempo number and the other, a slower song. I still remember the two songs. We decided to open with our version of Carl Perkins’ ‘Matchbox’ and our copy of Ben E. King’s dramatic version of ‘I who have nothing’ – later to become a hit for Shirley Bassey.

By the time we arrived on the day, we found some 320 assorted groups; musicians; singers, magicians, dancers, would-be redcoats and comedians there. The auditions were to take place in three large halls and a ‘Colonel Goodman’ held the rock ballroom auditions.

I had told Mum I was going to work as usual but the guys met me in Leeds, I changed clothes in the van and we drove straight to the audition. The day was pure chaos, we watched



many other groups playing throughout the morning with interest, picking out a good singer here and a good drummer there but we thought we were better.

Some groups were ordered to stop after only a few bars of the first song to let the next group on stage, very few made it through their two numbers in full.

The value of the equipment seen on the day made our eyes water, one guy played a Fender Telecaster Custom-Shop hand-built guitar and another had a coveted Gibson Stereo – said to be the first imported into the UK, there were also many Fender Showman amplifiers on show and Slingerland drum kits – stuff that our dreams were made of!

It was March 1964 when we did the audition, by then our hair was longer and our attitude had become far more 'cocky and self-assured'. We even had many local groups coming to see our gigs and our name was getting a few mentions in local papers. We were doing a few support shows in large ballrooms with bands like The Nashville Teens; The Hollies; Chubby Checker; Sounds Incorporated and a few others.

We went on stage that afternoon with confidence and determination, we vowed that, if we were stopped early, we would just carry on until the end – there was nothing to lose after all.

We did our two songs as if we were in a large ballroom with a large audience, we had a large audience – all made up by young rock musicians – the worst audience possible who could pick out one wrong note in a chord in an instant!

We were allowed to continue to the end of our two songs and, as we were starting to pack our gear away, a lady came over and asked me to go over and meet Colonel Goodman – my heart stopped, was there a possible chance? I then told the guys who hardly believed the news. I walked over, shook his hand and sat down next to him.

He looked at me briefly and said 'I'm giving you a contract right now to sign for two weeks at Butlins in Minehead followed by sixteen weeks at Butlins Filey. You'll get £25.00 per man per week payable every Friday lunch time in cash from your entertainments manager. You will play six days a week, for 90 minutes each afternoon and from 8 until 11.15 every night. You may also be called on to do a 10 minute spot on Sunday afternoons in the main show theatre for free.' He then pushed two contracts over for me to fill in and sign.

“ After realisation set in that we were now ‘professional’ I then knew I would have to break the news to Mum & Dad. ”

I looked at the two page contract with mouth agape and feverishly signed anything that was required. He handed me one copy and said –

‘By the way, if you don’t go down well, the entertainments manager will sack you on the spot – but if you do go down well I have the right to re-book you in 1965 with an increase of 15% per man, by the way, you’ve signed all of this in your contract.’

He then took a large sip of whisky and started to watch the next group who were all ready to play.

I think I didn’t walk back to the guys, I floated instead – they were stood there with mouths open especially when I waved the contract at them. They looked at the papers but could not be bothered to read the fine print – instead they asked what was going on. We got some coffees and I began to explain whilst members from other groups watched on deflated – we avoided eye contact with them.

It turned out that the contract we had for a rock ballroom band was the only one available. The other bands would have to work in the bars and be ‘commercial by playing top ten hits of the day’. It didn’t take long to realise we were well on the way to stardom by becoming rock legends (by then the term ‘rock’n’roll’ was passé – it was now just ‘Rock’.) After realisation set in that we were now ‘professional’ I then knew I would have to break the news to Mum & Dad.

That same night we were playing at a working men’s club in North Leeds, the last working men’s club we had to play as we had asked our agent not to book any more of these venues for us. We played the two half-hour sets as normal but we were on a high that night playing to an imaginary crowd of teenagers instead of the opposite who were far more concerned as to when the bingo would be held.

We were paid in cash before the second set and continued to play to ourselves until the end. After our last song, the concert secretary went to his podium, a full pint of black and tan in hand, (they always had a podium and most drank black and tan). He then announced in the standard official dialect that could only be replicated after a night of 10 pints and in tones that all ‘Con-Secs’ had but cannot be re-produced easily by the written word –

‘Laysngellemen, lets all show our apprecashun for our turn t’neet the Faboolas Dawnbrekkers just abaht to leave fer t’Butlins’

Silence followed as important last orders were being piled up on tables for later.

Our ConSec took another large gulp of ale and then followed with –

‘An now Laysngellemen, all be upstanding as t’Dawnbrekkers will play The Queen’ – immediately he finished his words Dave, our rhythm guitarist went to the nearest mike and bellowed – ‘At darts and dominos’!

His words were not appreciated.



‘Peter, take the chance you have son, it’s a slim chance but a chance nonetheless.

If you throw it away, you will regret it forever



We never played ‘The Queen’ that night, nor did we ever play ‘The Queen’ again, we just packed up our gear and drove away with our ConSec’s words ringing in our ears to say ‘That’s th’end for thee lot, mark mi words, ah’ll see to it thall nivver play another club agin’ – fortunately, we never did.

The day after was Friday, I went to work as usual but spent most of the morning writing my two weeks notice to present to the office manager Mr. Binns or ‘JPB’ as he was known. I handed it to him at 4.30pm after mentioning to all the others that I was leaving, some of the nicest men and women I’ve ever met worked there as clerks and typists. One particular typist and I had something going between us after the last office Christmas party, but that’s another story.

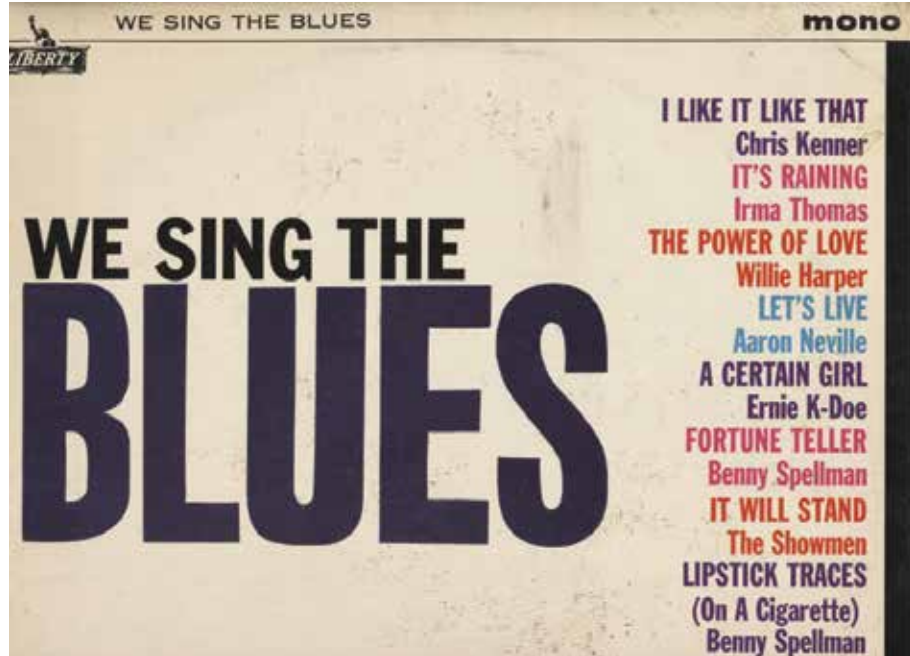
I got home that night for tea as usual and had about an hour to spare before changing to go before I would be collected to go to another gig. Mum, Dad and Carole were there and I wondered how I could possibly attempt to break the news to them. I need not have worried because just after tea there was a knock on the door, Dad opened it to see Mr. Binns outside with his car on the road. He came into the house and Mum offered him some tea whilst I rushed upstairs to get washed and changed.

I went downstairs very reluctantly some ten minutes later and walked into the room to find Mum in tears whilst Dad, Carole and ‘Jimmy’ Binns just stared at me. Mr. Binns started by saying - ‘Peter, do you realise that you are throwing away a job of a lifetime?’ whilst Mum just sobbed. He then said ‘In a few years, you’ll be able to buy a house and even a car with the money you will be earning, you’ll never make that kind of money by singing in a group.’

I replied by apologising for the problems I was causing but tried to explain that it was something I just had to do ‘before I got too old’ – I was 20 years old at the time. I also mentioned I would be getting exactly twice the weekly wage I was getting at Esso Petroleum. He even offered to increase my wage to £15.00 per week but I was adamant. It was then that Dad surprised us all and said –

‘Peter, take the chance you have son, it’s a slim chance but a chance nonetheless. If you throw it away, you will regret it forever because you will always believe you could have made it and that doubt will remain on your mind always. Just give it your very best lad.’

Mum became angry whilst Dad came over and gave me a big hug. The guys pulled up outside and pressed the horn. I left with tears in my eyes and climbed inside the van, the guys looked at me and said ‘Have you done it?’ – I nodded my head.



A real landmark LP for me

Two weeks later, after receiving my final pay from Esso, I became a professional musician often wondering if I'd made the right decision. The weeks leading up to our first season at Butlins were spent rehearsing for hours on end in a local church hall. During that time we all took records we thought were worth learning as we added more and more to the lists of numbers we could play. We played these on our trusty 'Dansette Major' portable record player and recorded a few via a single microphone onto a portable Grundig reel to reel tape machine that we treasured.

I took one track from a treasured LP I had bought some years before; I still have the album today. I was impressed by the voice of the singer and instantly knew I could never, ever have that kind of vocal talent. It was also a very, very difficult song to attempt to sing in the way that the original had been performed. I had never heard the name of the singer before or since then but ranked his amazing voice along with other truly great singers of the day like the natural 'ease' of Sam Cooke, the haunting voice of Orbison and the phrasing precision of Dion.

Although all the tracks on the album were superb and all came from New Orleans, (a place I still have to visit) the stand-out track for me has always been 'Let's Live' written and performed superbly by a certain Aaron Neville.

We learned the song and rehearsed it many times. I tried to put a '60's feel to it instead of the soulful rendering by Aaron which I had no chance of emulating. The track still stands today exactly as wonderful as it did to me then.

It was not to be until the late 1970's before I heard his name mentioned again when he and his brothers had been finally 'discovered' by famous artists such as Bonnie Raitt, Daniel Lanois, Dr. John, Allen Toussaint and Linda Ronstadt.

The Neville Brothers, and especially Aaron, are now world famous, and rightly so, in the promotion and development of New Orleans soul/R&B music. It is hard for me to think today that someone may be able to upstage Aaron's vocal prowess, I thought the same of Sam Cooke's version of 'A Change is Gonna Come' – that's until I heard Seal's truly superb version in late 2008. Whilst it may not be better than Sam's version, I think it's just as good – something I never thought I'd say.

Before we left for Minehead we decided to record some tracks at a private two track studio in North Leeds owned by a guy named Luke Harding.

“ We looked at each other as if to say
‘What did we do?’ ”

The two track ‘studio’ was in the attic of a three story terraced house and Luke’s son Ricky headed a band named ‘The Cresters’ who were quite famous in the area, they later went on to become a very popular group on the night club and theatre scene all over the UK.



**‘The Cresters’
showing Ricky and
his White Falcon**

Ricky also owned the only Gretsch White Falcon guitar in England at the time; it cost £700.00 – then a small fortune. He was always rated as one of the top guitarists in Leeds by many other guitarists of the day.

We recorded several tracks at Luke’s studio before leaving for Butlins, one of them was ‘Let’s live’. If I recall correctly we also recorded Jimmy Reed’s ‘Shame, Shame, Shame’ and Arthur Alexander’s ‘Go Home Girl’. We had acetates made of all the tracks and took them with us to Butlins.

‘Let’s Live, before it’s too late, Let’s Live’

Preparations and rehearsals for Minehead were carefully made in advance and it was covered by The Yorkshire Evening Post newspaper that helped by sending reporters around to get photographs and take details of the entire group. This publicity was not only good for us it made many other local groups green with envy - which we liked even better!

We left at 2.00am in the darkness to try and avoid hold-ups from holiday traffic especially around the Birmingham and Bristol areas. There were five of us together with all our equipment and luggage crammed inside a Ford Thames van that had our name emblazoned on both sides and had also seen many better days.

The journey got us to the gates of the Minehead camp at around mid-day after many top-ups of the radiator. We were met and scrutinised by security guards who telephoned the entertainments office on camp to say we’d arrived. We were then ordered to go straight away to report to the entertainments officer. His office was in the centre of the camp and we found our way there and filed into the building where an assistant showed us all into his office immediately where we nodded our heads and said hello to him.

He gazed in silence at what he viewed before him before finally saying –

‘Oh dear!’

We looked at each other as if to say ‘What did we do?’

He then opened a drawer in his desk, pulled out a book and started to find a particular page. After finding it, he looked at us and said, in perfect BBC English -



'This is the Butlin's Book of Rules which you can all see, by the thickness, covers many rules. I will not bore you with them all but instead go directly to one rule which I believe will seriously affect all five of you entertainers before me. The rule is this, and I quote, – No member of Butlin's staff will, under any circumstances, ever become personally or closely involved with any of our valued guests whilst on camp at any time of the day or night by sharing chalets together. Any member of staff found contravening this rule will be removed from camp immediately.'

We gazed at each other with our angel faces that screamed 'What on earth is he talking about?'

I made a feeble attempt to reply by saying – 'We have all given up good jobs to carry out this contract, our interest is our music, that's why we are here.' The statement may have started loud and clear but, I admit it did tail-off to be a little less forceful towards the end.

He looked again at the five before him and then said – 'OK, I'll spell it out in language you will probably understand much better. There are many very attractive ladies working here as our staff, you'll find them in shops, restaurants, bars, dining rooms and even the ones who keep our chalets nice and clean, there are also many others in various areas of entertainment like yourselves.

This ample supply of lovely ladies are fair game for any other member of staff such as you five standing before me now. You may do with them whatever you wish, as long as it is within the law, as it is no concern of mine. However, should we discover any one of you shagging a single one of our paying campers you will be outside the camp faster than the speed of light. Now, do you all understand?'

We all thought better against a further protest, we were then given individual chalet keys on the staff lines and shown where the rock ballroom was in order that we could set up our equipment and do a sound check before we gave our first performance that same evening. After all that was out of the way we unpacked our cases and all met up to get some coffee and snacks.

This time of the year was early and the camp was only half full in comparison to what it would be in the peak holiday season. As a result, all the new staff on the camp were learning how to cope with their new-found jobs when business was relatively quiet.

That night at exactly 8.00, The Dawnbreakers kicked off and played to an audience that built up to over 300 by the end of the night. We later learned that half of these people in the audience may have been camp staff coming in to check out the new rock group on camp. After the show finished we were making our way to the dressing room when we were approached for the very first time by campers asking us to sign our autographs for them – that was a 'first'!



We all went to a snack bar on camp that was open late, had a couple of coffees and a sandwich before we realised we hadn't slept for nearly 40 hours. We agreed to meet the following morning in the canteen for breakfast at 9.00 after which we all went to bed in our cosy chalets, dreaming of the season before us soon to find ourselves falling fast asleep.

The next morning I was refreshed and made my way to the canteen for breakfast to meet the guys. We started to eat before noticing that Mick, our lead guitarist, was not with us. At first we just carried on eating thinking he'd overslept, after a further 20 minutes passed, John, our drummer said he'd run over and knock him up. Five minutes later John returned to say he was not in his chalet, furthermore he had looked inside through a gap in the curtains and Mick's chalet was completely empty inside.

As though we all thought the very same thing at the very same time we headed for the van and drove to the camp gates to find the uniformed security staff beaming at us with a broad grin on their faces.

As we got out of the van they simply pointed as if on a pre-arranged cue. There was Mick, at the other side of the gate sitting on his suitcase with his guitar case by his side and almost in tears. We drove outside the camp, picked him up and we all drove into Minehead town after realising the worst.

The worst was quite simple to understand, Mick had been caught in his room shagging a camper on the very first night. What made it much worse was that her parents had reported her missing to the camp security officers who simply made a bee-line to our chalets. Mick's chalet happened to be the first one they checked, they had packed his case, got his guitar and then kicked him out – he'd been sleeping outside the camp gates since 1.30am. We never found out what the girl's parents had to say about it all.

And there we were, 'The Dawnbreakers', a professional rock group without a very important member – namely a lead guitarist, and the four remaining members were stranded in a sleepy town miles away from modern-day civilisation! What hurt more was that we had not yet finished one full day of our lifetime 'careers'!

The first thing we did was telephone our agent in Bradford to give him the news and he was mortified. This was not because of any genuine consideration for us at all but because of the fact that he was earning £12.50 per week in commission for the next 18 weeks! He also realised just how critical the situation was to his pocket if we could not get a new guitarist, and rapid. I read out to him a hastily-scribbled advert to put in next week's issues of Melody Maker and New Musical Express which said:-

'Pro rock group currently on an 18 week summer season at Butlins need lead guitarist for r&b rock ballroom group – no pop music played. Must be available now, must play well, and must look good, skinny and hungry.'



We then went to find the only music shop in town and filed inside. We told the owner our predicament and he scratched his head for a few minutes. He went through a few names in an address book and came up with one name. He said – 'This guy's fair, he's bought a Gretsch double cutaway from me, he's at college but comes out at lunchtime.' He then wrote down his address, we got into the van and drove away. We got to the address around 12.00 lunchtime and waited, in around 10 minutes or so we saw a young guy unlocking the house door and descended on him in force. We sat outside his house and told him the tale, we also told him we needed to be back on stage in a couple of hours. He looked back at each of us carefully for a minute or so.

Without any hesitation, he ran into the house and brought back an amplifier which we loaded into the truck, brought out his guitar, scribbled a note for his mum and jumped in – within 15 minutes we were back on camp and setting everything up on stage. We ran through 12 bar songs for an hour or so, just as long as they were up-tempo and that he could play the opening guitar riffs and a presentable range of solos as loud as possible. We left him practising guitar riffs and experimenting with the amplifier sound – it was the first large hall he'd ever played in.

The guy at the shop was right – he was 'fair' but no more. However, for us he was life and death and James Burton all rolled into one. We got on stage that afternoon and by then all the staff on camp had heard the news which was always circulated to all as a warning to others. The off-duty staff came along to support us with some of the younger campers who were not allowed out in the evenings. Before we struck the first note I noticed the entertainments manager standing at the back of the hall, arms folded and a very wry smile on his face.

**'I got lumps in my throat when I saw her
coming down the aisle**

**I got shivers in my knees when she looked at
me and squeezed a smile**

**There she is again standing over by the
record machine**

**Looking like a model on the cover of a
magazine**

**She's too young to be a minute over
seventeen**

Meanwhile – I'm thinking.....

She's in the mood, no need to fake it

I got a chance I ought to take it

Now if she'll dance we can make it

Come here Queenie – let's shake it!'

We played that afternoon with endless howlers that no-one but us seemed to notice. The kids were all dancing as their Mums and Dads watched on bravely bearing the noise with forced smiles on their faces. The staff cheered us on and the entertainments officer left after nodding to me and giving a 'thumbs up' sign. From 4.30 to 8.00pm after the hall was closed we rehearsed and rehearsed inside with no time for food and drink. The real test would be for the evening show when all the real rock fans would come.



We explained everything to our new guitarist and said we would pay him well until we got a full-time replacement. He replied by saying it was a fantastic experience for him and would play as long as we needed him.

Temporary guitarist on left

It must have been the era or something 'new-age' that surrounded the music of the day that got us through at Minehead. We knew that we had many short-comings over the next few days yet it was only ourselves who were far from satisfied with our performances. Soon we were called on to pose for official photographs that went on to be sold by Butlins at four shillings and sixpence each for the campers who brought them to us for autographs.

On the Friday morning our advertisement came out for a replacement guitarist, our agent rang to say a guy from London was on the way over by car as he spoke. He could only tell us he had a Gretsch guitar and a good amplifier. The guy arrived as we were in the middle of our afternoon set and waved to us from the back of the hall, pointing at his guitar case. At the end of the set he came over and introduced himself as Roger. As far as looks went he was perfect, tall, thin and a hair do that reminded us of Clapton who was becoming big at the time with guitarists in the UK. He explained he'd just come back from touring as lead player for Roy Orbison but was far more interested in the music we were playing. We also realised that having a guy from London in the band would be far more credible than just guys from Leeds – London was just beginning to overtake the Liverpool scene.

We locked the ballroom and Roger set up his gear whilst our stalwart temporary guitarist listened, at the end of the first song he came over and said 'I can't compete with this guy but someday I will'. We all shook hands and hugged each other, I paid him in full, he walked out with his equipment and we never saw him again.

A few minutes later, after a hurried conversation between us, we offered Roger the job and he accepted immediately. After endless days of rehearsals and performances The Dawnbreakers were back and firing on all cylinders. We could play all our songs and also managed to add a few new ones to our repertoire by the time we had to make our journey from Minehead to Filey. Even in the last few days at Minehead we also noticed just how popular we were becoming with the audiences. Some of the Minehead staff were successful in applying for, and getting, similar jobs at Filey in order to spend the rest of the season with us.

We were allowed two days to break down our gear at Minehead and be ready to play on stage at Filey. Dave, our rhythm guitarist, Roger and myself drove there stopping at Leeds briefly on the way whilst Rod, our bass player and John, the drummer, took the train. We met up again at Filey to discover Rod & John with scratched faces and a few facial bruises that occurred when changing trains at York.



Apparently they were identified as being two of The Merseybeats who were playing that night in York and had to be rescued from a mob of girls who were waiting at the platform. Once the girls glimpsed two guys with long black hair coming off a train they pounced and the railway police were called in to rectify the situation. They were carried into a nearby office and given drinks until the station was brought back to normal once more.

Before we could enter the Rock Ballroom at Filey, we had to report to the entertainments manager who was waiting for us. His counterpart in Minehead had informed him of our 'reputation' and he had decided that we would not be allowed to have chalets on the camp. Instead he handed us keys for two caravans on a nearby site and warned us again of the dangers in having dalliances with his campers. We drove straight to our caravans and took all our clothes and belongings in before returning to the camp.

Filey was, by far, the most important and biggest Butlins camp of the day. It was enormous and also proud of the fact that it had the biggest single-floor theatre in the UK that seated over 3,600 people. On entering the Rock Ballroom for the first time, it blew us away – it was enormous and our dressing room was only some 50 feet away from the raised stage. We had to call in maintenance staff with platforms in order to get the P.A. speakers up into the rafters with extension leads and then try them out in various positions and angles in order to get the best sound possible. This was the first hall I could not get any 'feed-back' screams from the P.A. amplifier as the speakers were too far away. For the entire season my Dynacord amplifier was turned up to maximum volume which was only just enough to fill that cavernous hall!

'64 at Filey was a period in my life of pure magic; again it must have been that period in time that did it. Looking back we were kids the very ones who had our fingers on the pulse of the real music of the day that had nothing whatsoever to do with the music in the charts.

Instead we were playing stuff that had not yet really been heard but knew that it would be heard in the future. It was still the early days for rock bands that were springing up all over the country and I suppose we were the 'avant-garde' of the day along with many other groups all going down the same road of exploration into the unknown.

The Beatles and The Stones had made it easier for us all by playing and recording songs written and recorded by their American idols that gave these guys the influences that really started them off in the first place. The lower UK groups like us were also delving seriously into rarer USA music from black blues musicians like Johnny Otis; Muddy Waters; Howling Wolf; Buddy Guy; Bo Diddley; Elmore James together with black soul musicians like Marvin Gaye; Bobby Bland; Ray Charles; Smokey Robinson; The Staples Singers and other musicians like Mose Allison; Ronnie Hawkins; Bobby Charles and Charlie Rich.



A monster song for us that year that we always finished the night with was 'Louie Louie' recorded by The Kingsmen. The reaction to this was simply incredible, before the last verse was started the security officers would surround the stage in preparation to escort us to our dressing room before they began to clear the ballroom after which we could escape to our van through a fire exit. Friday nights were even worse as the campers who were leaving the next day had taken a full dose of alcohol and were crying in front of the stage begging for autographs.

On the dreaded 'Scots Fortnight' the alcohol became neat whisky despite the cost per shot doubling for that period. Campers who were totally beyond control at the end of the Friday night were sometimes bundled into large trucks and driven to the North Yorkshire Moors before being deposited there by very large security guards.

The Dawnbreakers at Filey '64 (pictured above)

Very few people ever knew the words of 'Louie Louie' and they were almost impossible to decipher on listening to the record.

In truth, they were seriously obscene, even by today's liberal standards, but I sang them every night as I heard them reproduced on the record. No-one ever queried them but the guys in the band always smiled when the words came around.

Butlins sold over 10,000 copies of our photographs that year although we never saw one penny – apparently that was in the small print of our contract. However, there was good news beyond belief for us, the campers who had seen us at Filey returned home and headed straight to the major clubs in their towns and cities. They insisted to the club owners to book

our group at their venues when the season was over. As a result, our agent kept sending us revised schedules for new dates and new venues all over the UK – the list almost kept us in work for another entire year. He also mentioned he had contacted Decca Records and sent them an acetate pressing of our tracks recorded before we left for the summer season.

As the weeks proceeded during that summer, it became almost impossible to walk around the camp freely without being surrounded by music fans – and the vast majority were girls. The entertainments manager revelled in it and, by the middle of our first contract, he'd already sent us a letter detailing his right to sign us for one more season in '65. Soon afterwards he called us into his office to explain we would be playing a 10 minutes spot every Sunday afternoon in the Gaiety Theatre. He said we would use the house P.A. system and would take part in the one hour show alongside show dancers, comedians, solo singers and some famous names of the day.

Before the first spot we did there, we were shown to our dressing room by a redcoat and then a lady came in to cover our faces with stage make-up – we were horrified to see ourselves in the mirror afterwards. She told us that it would look good under the spotlights and then began to brush our hair.

We had planned and timed three songs to the ten minute perfection and, before we went on stage behind the closed curtains, the stage manager told us we had an audience of over 3,000 paying customers before us. That was the first time I had ever experienced 'nerves' and my stomach became knotted with the thought of what was going to happen in a few seconds.



The band went to pick up their instruments whilst the MC stood in front of the curtain and announced us. I was waiting in the wings – trembling, I never heard the announcement only the screams coming from the crowd I could not see for the bright lights. The guys were standing there centre stage and perfectly still until Rod gave me a nod after the screaming abated – that was my cue from the wings so, to hell with it, I screamed –

‘I’m a road runner hon-eee-eee-eee-eee-ey’

Then followed a strangled scratching sound from Roger’s guitar as he scraped a knife blade slowly up the wound strings on the neck of his treasured Gretsch which sounded like a racing car pulling away followed at the end by a ‘Beep Beep’ from the guys. Then the sound exploded as I shot out across the stage and only could hear the screaming from then on in, it drowned out all our amplifiers and I could only turn to John our drummer who was cueing my words for me.

The guys played a whole 12 bar verse of pounding guitar music before I got to my beginning which really didn’t matter. I started singing to see bouncers making a barrier in front of the floor of the theatre some six feet below us and then watched as a part of the audience began to edge forward. We kept on playing as fingers began to appear on the edge of the stage and they were followed by elbows and heads rising up before us.

**‘You think you fast? Hah ha ha ha
But it don’t look like you can last - ha ha hah
Goodbye, I gotta put you down
I’ll see you someday baby
Maybe one day hanging around’**

Before the last notes ended, the curtains closed in front of us and the sirens started to evacuate the building. Guys came up and dragged us offstage and into a truck waiting at the back of the theatre, four of us made it but John our drummer disappeared amongst some screaming girls. We were driven to our dressing room at the Rock Ballroom and John followed in another car covered from head to toe with lipstick and a happy smile on his face.



That was the first and last time we did the Gaiety Theatre in 1964.

Live shot in the Rock Ballroom 1964 (pictured above)

As the weeks went by we did not have to pay for any food or drink at all as we were fed by pretty ladies from the camper's restaurant who smuggled the best food out and brought it to our dressing room daily.

The dressing room by then, had the walls and ceiling adorned with various items of ladies underwear in a complete range of delicate colours. We never really knew how these items managed to get there – it was to remain a complete mystery.

About ten years later, upon seeing the film 'The Last Waltz' for the first time, I chuckled as Robbie Robertson related his welcome to 'The Hawks' by singer Ronnie Hawkins who said to him - 'You won't make much money boy, but you'll get more pussy than Frank Sinatra'!

We returned to Leeds with Mick re-joining the band and were faced with a new situation which was a full booking list for months ahead in just about every area of England and Scotland possible. Whilst our nightly fee was over twice or three times what it was before Butlins it also meant larger halls and that meant much more powerful sound equipment.

More powerful sound equipment meant much larger units in size. Larger units meant much more space was needed in transportation. Much greater distances between gigs meant much more reliable transportation.

Music was also changing quicker than we could ever have believed and, although we each knew each other's style by heart, we knew changes would have to be made in order to keep on progressing along the fabled road to stardom.

Drummers in groups were always the ones who posed few problems; I think it had something to do with the incessant pounding they made. Drummers were usually completely 'thick' and contributed little towards ideas and musical improvements. All they needed was a drum kit, spare sticks and spare skins. If they had no spare skins to use that never really troubled them even in the middle of a gig. They would simply transfer to another drum for the night without a care in the world and try to remember to get a new skin the next day. If they forgot, which they always did, there was always the next day.

It was always the guitarists who were chasing their dreams daily. Soon afterwards, very cheap, second-hand Pink Fender Strats were in found abundance everywhere from guitarists who considered Hank B. Marvin to be 'old school' by now. The fact that Hank probably influenced just about every bloody guitar player in the '60's to start playing the guitar in the first place (which he did) – he was now not in favour by the very ones who had worshipped him and tried to copy every single note he played only a few years earlier.

By late 1964 the groups were using guitars from Gibson; Epiphone; Guild; Gretsch and some sunburst Fenders – anything to disassociate them from The Shadows. The Gibson 'Les Paul' was soon to become new 'Ax' to own for many self-respecting guitarists who sought 'respectability' on stage.

The Beatles made that statement very clear from the outset by using Hofner, Rickenbacker and Gretsch guitars on stage. It is said that John Lennon refused to wear glasses on stage for fear he may come over as Hank or Buddy Holly. As a result he would often be seen live on stage bumping into the microphone after he'd first located it with his mouth – ouch!

The Dawnbreakers had to go with the flow; old equipment was traded in for a pittance against new, bigger and more powerful amplification that cost a fortune. New guitars came to each rehearsal and a new long wheelbase van was acquired. We were soon earning big money only to pay it back to the hire purchase companies whilst our agent's 10% went on unaffected apart from a steep rise in income!

In early 1965 we got the news that Decca Records wished to sign us and The Dawnbreakers were now recording artists on a major label. Because of this our booking fees went up another 15% and so did our agent's commission that rose accordingly.



We had to get a 'B' side for 'let's Live' and went to a recording studio in Altrincham near Manchester to record a song I had written named 'Lovin' for You'. This eventually was to be the final flipside. By then Dave had left the band to be replaced by Barry a very good keyboard player also from Leeds.

Decca Records took publicity shots of the group and asked us to get someone to form a fan club.

Just prior to the release of the record, Rod, our bass player, casually informed us whilst driving to a gig that we had a booking at The Flamingo Club on London's Wardour Street in a few weeks time.



This club was famous in launching the career of Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames, a jazz orientated organ-based outfit that was becoming popular in the more serious music scenes at the time. It was owned by Georgie's manager Rik Gunnell and the audience was 95% black people. Rod mentioned it would be a real step towards the 'big time' whilst I shuddered even when thinking about it.

We may well have been big wheels on the local scene in Leeds but the bright lights of London were another matter altogether.

The dreaded day came around and we set up our equipment in the afternoon. We were sitting around a table drinking expensive coca cola when Rik Gunnell came over and sat down. He informed us that we would not go on stage until 10.30 that night as another band was playing before us, in his words:-

'Bear with me guys, there's another local band coming to do a free audition – there's hundreds want a shot at this club and so I've decided to give them a break.'

We sat there and I thought that this may be better for us to go on after the audience had warmed up with a few drinks inside them. More cokes and coffees followed as the audience began to arrive.

We watched then as a line of sharp dressed guys and ladies started to load equipment onto the stage. Then more followed and then even more followed with even more people busying themselves around the stage. We watched, mouths agape as they started unpacking their instruments and sound equipment – an organ; electric piano; drums; congas; three guitars; two tenor saxophones; one baritone saxophone; one trombone; one trumpet followed by huge towers of amplification.

“ Hey folks, thanks for coming down to the world famous Flamingo Club that’s home to your favourite guy Georgie ”

We looked at each other in amazement; they needed five vans to carry that gear and themselves from wherever they had come. The outfits they were wearing must have cost the earth as they busied themselves preparing the stage to perfection. Whilst all this was taking place the audience were dancing and drinking totally unconcerned. We just looked on in total silence.

At 9.30 the music stopped and the lights were directed to the stage where a drummer and bass player kicked off the live music. The audience vacated the dance floor in disgust and went over to the tables and the bar. A pianist picked up the rhythm and joined in, then from the side of the stage came a skinny white guy in a light blue suit and a pork pie hat shaking his body to the beat behind him as he said ‘Hey folks, thanks for coming down to the world famous Flamingo Club that’s home to your favourite guy Georgie’ – at that very word, the entire audience stood up and began to chant ‘Georgie, Georgie, Georgie!.

We sat at the table – our eyes were piercing Rod who was watching completely unaware of our significant discomfort as ‘blue suit’ came back with ‘Hey folks, no sweat – Georgie is away tonight but I’m here to chase your blues away.’

The beat got fuller as the guys with the horns filed like soldiers onto the tiny stage to show more plumbing than the largest plumber’s merchant I could have ever imagined. At a flick of the fingers from ‘blue suit’ the horn players joined in the background riff as an organ sounded from left of the stage and ‘blue suit’ continued his introduction.

‘My name folks is Hogsnort Rupert and this is my Good, Good Band’, he snapped his fingers again as four ladies in tight black dresses slowly filed onto the stage before he announced ‘These are my very own ladies who are joining us this evening and are known as The Sofines..... So here we have it folks, you are listening to Hogsnort Rupert and His Good Good band featuring The Sofines.’

At a drop of a hat, the music stopped and a tenor player screamed the opening melody of Ray Charles’ version of ‘The Right Time’ – for a moment I really thought it was the Ray Charles’ band live on stage until Hogsnort started to scream ‘You know the night time, is the right time to be with the one you love now’ and the So-fines came in with the backing vocals and sounding just like the Raelets.

They were truly magnificent, we were completely useless!

They did a blistering one hour non-stop performance to perfection that left me breathless and about to jump on the table and scream for more but looked around to see that no-one had even listened to them.

Someone started to shout 'Georgie' and started a slow hand clap, others joined in and 'Georgie' became louder and louder until the sound system came alive with more music and the dancing started again.

They packed all their gear away, I just wanted the ground to open up and swallow me. To make matters worse, Rik came over and said 'Sorry Guys, had to give them a chance. Who knows, they may get to be good some day'?

By then my eyes were boring into the back of Rod's head, when it was time to get on stage my feet were like lead, I knew we would die right there that night. We started to play Jimmy Reed blues tunes but no-one even looked over to the stage let alone get up to do a slow dance. We finished around four tunes to total silence until a tall, skinny white guy with long, straggly hair came up to me and whispered 'Let me take over from your drummer'.

The guy loped onto the stage, John left his kit and the stranger took his place, before he sat down he said to me 'Just play any Chuck Berry song' and walked over to the nearest microphone where he shouted 'Get your black asses onto the floor, we're gonna rock and roll because Ginger Baker says so'. With that Mick's guitar screamed the intro to 'The Promised Land' and Ginger Baker hit the skins.

We kept it up for an hour with sweat rolling off our bodies until the last note when the audience screamed approval. He left as suddenly as he appeared and vanished into the crowd – we packed our gear away, got paid and drove back to Leeds. All the way back from The Flamingo John kept repeating that he'd seen the best drummer in the world and now considered his drum kit to have been blessed by 'God'.

Our record went straight to number one in the local chart but failed to get more than 50 in the UK main charts of the day but it was then that we started to experience the true joys of 'the road' for the first time – it wasn't until the late 1970's that 'Endless Grey Ribbon', written by Nick Lowe captured those days on the road to true perfection.

We seemed to be travelling to all points of the UK with incredibly stupid journeys in-between gigs that were impossible to understand – only our agent was happy with his 10% coming in daily. There was one instance where we were booked at the Beach Ballroom in Aberdeen for one night which was followed by a 'late nighter' at the Golden Torch in Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent the next night.



After that gig we had to travel through the night back up past Aberdeen to Inverness Town Hall. We then had a whole day free to find the Loch Ness monster before one gig in Nairn followed by a night in Tain. Believe it or not we had to be down to the Mecca ballroom in Bristol the following night! Night driving in those days saw roads made up of long-distance lorry drivers and wandering rock groups trying to reach another gig or find more petrol.

'The cold, dark night is split by the stab of twin headlights like fingers, of guides that know of it but have never been there

And eyes, red-rimmed, appeal for the nth. time and strain for the road signs that flash past the windscreen in the hard driving rain

His mind is not dwelling on beds of white linen but the 'endless grey ribbon' that winds on ahead'

We started to play with many other bands of the day, usually as support but, as the months progressed, we did make a few as top of the bill with newer groups below us. The competition element was fierce and it was really only the groups themselves who recognised the 'bosses' of the day. These were the individuals and bands that were revered by the groups themselves – not the fans or the weekly rock publications. Some of these made it to deserved stardom but many others crashed and burned despite their very real and incredible talents. The fact that we were playing with these guys and watching every move they made resulted in some of it being washed off to our own influences which were soaked up gratefully.

1965 saw R&B clubs starting up all over the place all eager to emulate the successes of places like The Cavern in Liverpool; The Twisted Wheel in Manchester; The Rumrunner in Birmingham; The Marquee in London and The hallowed A-Gogo Club in Newcastle plus others where big acts could play regularly. Some very large pubs and hotels began to have regular evenings when relatively famous acts of the day could be seen. Universities became big venues for rock music and paid good money for the acts. By then 'All-Nighters' were held in large town centre venues such as town and civic halls or indoor bus stations where many name bands followed each other onto the stage from 8.00pm through to 4.00am and later. Even large RAF bases and US army bases in the UK gave us unlimited work especially the US base at Menwith Hill near Harrogate where we were given free overnight accommodation and all the food we could eat.

For a pro rock group of the day, work was easy to come by in the UK as well as in many European countries where 3 month well-paid contracts were not difficult to land.



We returned to Butlins in Filey in May 1965 with a new keyboard player and a new lead guitarist. We were much slicker and had many new songs to draw from as well as older repertoire. The Liverpool groups were still very strong but many others emerged from other areas after the Beatles and Stones had become pathfinders. We saw The Who; The Kinks; Donovan; The Hollies; Herman's Hermits; Dave Clark Five; John Mayall; The Animals; The Yardbirds and others come onto the UK scene whilst the new 'Electric Dylan' and The Byrds hit us from the USA. We coped with the season better than we had the '64 one as we were now completely aware of all the rules and all the ways to get around them. For the members of the band who were single, these long gigs were fine but this was not so for the ones with wives. Towards the end of the season we had to make line-up changes especially as we had a full date book of road gigs after the end of the season. The dance anthem for the rock ballroom that year was 'She's about a mover' by Doug Sahm a Texas rocker.

The Dawnbreakers, Filey '65 before the changes mid-way through the season. (pictured above)

Our bass player left to get married, our keyboard player and guitarist returned to their wives. We found good replacements for guitar and bass, we also added Art Lindon on tenor sax and flute but had to advertise for an organist in order to 'swell' the sound.

We got a reply from an organist who lived in the Newcastle area and he travelled down to Filey for an audition with us. His equipment was that of our wildest dreams, namely a Hammond C3 and twin Leslie speakers – perfection, the dream sound! We ran through several songs that afternoon and offered him the job – he accepted there and then, with one proviso.

He had just finished recording a single in London as member of a complete session band for (as he said) 'an oddball guy'. He'd been paid in full for the session at an excellent rate but had to sign a legal document to say he would become a full-time member of the band that would be formed if the single ever got released and then went on to become a hit. As he left us that day he mentioned that the single hadn't 'a cat in hell's chance of ever becoming a hit'.

“ ‘Sithee, ahd’ dee
mi ‘air pupple t’join
t’dawnbrekkers’ ”

The guys name was Mathew Fisher and the single with no hope?

‘A Whiter Shade of Pale’

Mathew played the Bach melody on the record and became a member of Procol Harem! The oddball guy was Keith Reid.

We went back to the drawing board. We finally found our Hammond organist in Graham Travis from Castleford in Yorkshire who also had the thickest Yorkshire accent I'd ever heard in my life – and I was a Yorkshireman. Before the audition we asked why he wanted to join the band – I still recall his reply which was –

‘Sithee, ahd’ dee mi ‘air pupple t’join t’dawnbrekkers’

A rough translation is – ‘Listen, I would dye my hair purple for the opportunity of joining The Dawnbreakers.’

Graham quickly became the target for our travel boredom. On one occasion we had a two week contract working in the Scottish borders for a famous booking agent who seemed to control all the gigs in the area. His name was Duncan McKinnon and was well-known all over ‘his patch’ as ‘Drunken Duncan’ – a true one-off.

About five miles before the Scottish border, Mick, who was driving, asked us all to present our passports for border inspection and stamping. Everyone apart from Graham knew this would happen and we handed Mick our fake documents.

Graham looked at us and said ‘Sithee, what’s tha doin’?

I explained we had to get our passports stamped before we could enter Scotland to which he replied ‘I ant got no bloody passport!’ Mick stopped the truck on the roadside and turned around, then said – ‘Everybody needs a bloody passport to get into Scotland – it’s another bloody country, if you’ve haven’t brought yours then get out, we’ll do the gigs without you, we’re already late as it is!’

Graham was 150 miles from home in the middle of a wilderness and, as usual, the weather was abysmal. He actually got out of the truck with his suitcase and stood there looking at us like a lost puppy until one of the guys (to order) said - ‘Listen, I have an idea, why don’t we get Graham to lie flat across the back seat. Then we’ll cover him with a blanket and three of us will sit on him until we get past the border?’

Someone else said ‘Isn’t that termed as smuggling?’

After a few minutes of debate we got Graham to lie flat, covered him with a blanket then three of us sat on top of him but not gently. Mick then proceeded to drive over every bump and pothole in the road and, with every one, a groan came from beneath us. After a few long minutes someone shouted ‘We’re here, there’s the checkpoint ahead’.

Mick was a superb impersonator and had the Scottish dialect to a tee. Before we stopped we shouted to Graham – ‘Don’t even breathe until we give the all-clear!’

When we stopped, Mick wound the window down and said ‘Good afternoon Sir, here are five passports for you.’

The reply came back – ‘Aye Laddie, kindly step down from your truck if ya dinna mind.’ Then the banter started – ‘You’ll be coming here to play some music eh?’ and ‘I’ve heard your kind are not unfamiliar with drugs and things?’ then ‘No Sir, we never touch drugs’ and on it went for five minutes. In the end a voice said ‘Dinna get yerselves into bother in Scotland, we ken yer names Laddies!’

As we pulled away, Graham began to relax beneath us but Mick shouted – ‘Stay still, they have sent a car that’s following us.’ He then proceeded to find more potholes in the road. About 20 minutes later Graham emerged white as a sheet before we explained to him that he was in Scotland illegally and suggested he didn’t make any purchases where a passport may be needed for the entire two weeks. He then asked how he was going to get back out and we said we’d think about it.

Working for Duncan was always a hit and miss affair. On one occasion we had to visit his house to clarify a particular booking. His house was part of an old castle that had been abandoned long ago; he lived in the part of the gatehouse that still had a roof. Also, as the rumours stated by many other groups we met, he DID have a still in the small garden. He lived

in a small two room area which was piled from floor to ceiling with contracts for visiting groups and solo entertainers. He had a telephone, a glass and a bottle and very little else. We soon accepted that the name of our group meant little to him at all; in fact he had no idea of any of the groups working for him at any given time.

On several occasions we arrived at a town hall to see a poster outside that said ‘Tonight, Live on Stage – THEM!’ or another with ‘THE ZOMBIES’ and so on. This always meant a phone call to Duncan, the earlier the better as his speech became harder to understand as the day progressed.

Duncan, however, had heard all of this before and always had an answer which always worked out in the end. Whoever was staging the event in whichever town always had a supply of plain white paper board circles to fit on the front of a bass drum. Then a local sign writer (that he also knew) would come along and paint the appropriate name for that night before fixing it on the front of the bass drum.

He also had the matter in hand when we mentioned that we did not know or play any songs by that particular group. To rectify this, the MC who announced us apologised to the crowd that ‘Them’ or ‘The Zombies’ were not allowed to play their hit songs as copyright had not yet been authorised for Scotland.

And, do you know what? – They believed him completely! The gigs always went down a storm and, on many occasions, I have signed my autograph as 'Van Morrison' and several other names also.

Gigs throughout Scotland were always welcome, at the end of the night the organisers would bring tables of food and drink on to the dance floor and we could always eat for free. This was a tradition in Scotland apart from the big venues in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

We never went without bed and breakfast as Duncan personally knew the name of every hotel owner in every town and they, in turn, knew Duncan. We were often told to visit a hotel late at night and ask for 'Alistair' or some other name and then mention that 'Duncan had sent us'. It never failed once no matter how late!

The winter of '65/66 took us all over the UK playing support to many new bands that were on the way to fame. We first saw Stevie Winwood when we supported the Spencer Davis group at Leeds University, upon hearing that wonderful, soulful voice live for the first time it almost finished my aspirations to be a rock singer. We played again with him at Carlisle with Fontella Bass and at Nottingham University later on.

on one rare night off we saw The Paramounds supporting Cream in Leeds. The Paramounds had always been a 'band's band' from Southend, tremendous lead singer and keyboard

man Gary Brooker deserved the success he would soon get, it was long overdue. Guitarist Robin Trower also shone that night. It was an early gig for Cream but that was a night to remember.

We often worked for a Bradford agent named Benny Netherwood who ran a Sunday Blues/R&B club in a large private Hotel on Ilkley Moor called The Stony Lea. He always tried to book new bands that he thought would make it one day and at the lowest possible price – it was always a risk. He'd booked Jimi Hendrix direct from his manager, Chas Chandler, 18 months before for a fee of £30.00 and asked us to go as support on the night for £50.00! I told Benny that there was no possible chance that Hendrix would honour the contract but I was completely wrong.

We arrived with some ladies at the venue around 4.00pm to set up our gear and, by then, there was a queue of around 200 fans already lining up to enter the club at 7.30pm. We got all our sound check completed and sat down with Benny for a drink. Benny was expecting to make a small fortune that night and was rubbing his hands together in anticipation with a huge smile on his face.



With 15 minutes still to go, the Hendrix trio were carried into a makeshift dressing room and Benny came to me, pressed £100.00 into my hand and asked us to start playing the moment the doors were opened in order to get the punters in quicker.



Around 5.30pm we got a frantic telephone call from one of the Hendrix roadies who asked how he could get the trucks near to the hotel entrance to offload and set up. We all rushed outside only to find a sea of heads in front of us covering the entire car park and spilling out onto the main road in one of the most expensive and sought-after areas of the Yorkshire Dales.

I suggested calling in the police but Benny just scowled at me and said 'Are you serious?' We all went outside and tried to clear a path for the vehicles which could only be seen in the distance down the hill which led into Ilkley town centre just over a mile away.

Benny was screaming to them all – 'If you don't make way for the roadies, you won't even see Hendrix play tonight!' Eventually, others joined in to help and three trucks finally got to the car park and a team of roadies started off-loading and setting up.

Towers of speakers that would fill Wembley stadium were set up all around the moderate-sized room and the first mixer desk we'd ever seen was placed into position in the centre of the room. The guy in charge told Benny that Hendrix and the band were flying into Leeds and Bradford airport and then taking taxis to the gig. I then sat down and wondered just how far the princely £30.00 fee could possibly stretch!

There was still 30 minutes to go before the doors could be opened and Benny dare not look at what was going on outside the hotel. He then asked the ladies with us if they would all assist in taking entrance money at the door when it opened. They looked a little disappointed as they had come to see the bands, Benny solved the situation by pressing a £20.00 note in each of their hands which brought smiles to their faces and eager nods of acceptance. Entry to the club that night was £2.00 – expensive!

With 15 minutes still to go, the Hendrix trio were carried into a makeshift dressing room and Benny came to me, pressed £100.00 into my hand and asked us to start playing the moment the doors were opened in order to get the punters in quicker. We started up as the doors opened and the girls on the door got to work, the bar opened and got besieged with thirsty fans within seconds. I have never seen a room fill as quickly and all available seats were taken in minutes.

Benny was well-aware of what was taking place as he wrung his hands together and gazed skywards hoping that his £2.00 entry fees would continue all night long. He also was well aware that the house limit for that room was 400 only. There were already over 1,000 fans in that room by then adjoining rooms and corridors were filling to capacity whilst Benny sat at the back of the room and prayed.

It was 8.30pm when the sirens sounded outside, by then the bar had sold out of every drop of liquid and the staff had left. Police came in as fire engines tried to get into the car park. We were told to stop playing immediately and one policeman was shouting down a walkie-talkie that he estimated another 3,000 fans were still queuing up the hill all the way from Ilkley.

“ The next time we saw her, we asked her and she agreed to handle the Dawnbreakers Fan Club – her name was Hilary Ward. ”

One policeman with a bullhorn was shouting for the organiser to report to him – Benny didn't hear him, he was far too busy collecting the take from his 'staff'. Soon afterwards, Benny disappeared from sight and we started to pack away our gear. The police escorted Jimi and his Experience into nearby police cars and then they disappeared.

I heard again from Benny some months later when he gave us another booking at the same venue with just ourselves playing that night. He never mentioned the Hendrix gig and the night went well without a hitch. Benny got on stage half-way through our last set and announced – 'Thanks to everyone making it down tonight and don't forget, next Sunday we have live on stage at the Stony Lea, from the USA, the legendary Sonny Boy Williamson for your delight.'

I whispered to him in one ear – 'Benny, Sonny Boy died last week!' He turned round to me in horror and then pulled out some paper from his pocket. He waved it at the audience and said –

'Here's the contract Folks!'

That was the last time I ever saw Benny Netherwood.

We finally finished the 'B' side of our first single and went to Decca Records for promotion photographs where they also insisted we appoint a Fan Club Secretary immediately. On the way back to Leeds we were all thinking who we could ask to do the job when someone mentioned a trainee nurse who always came to see us when we played gigs in Leeds.

The next time we saw her, we asked her and she agreed to handle the Dawnbreakers Fan Club – her name was Hilary Ward.

The single came out and had enormous local success but only crept into the lower part of the UK top 50 for 2 weeks and then disappeared, but, by then, we were on a roll and knew stardom was only just around the corner. We added a keyboard player to the band and a saxophonist to boost the overall sound, by then we had to have two trucks and were playing all over the UK five to seven nights a week.

We did many 'All-Nighters' at big venues such as Birmingham Town Hall, London University, Leeds Town Hall, The Marquee, The Round House, Glasgow Maryland, Manchester's Twisted Wheel Club, The Flamingo and many other prestige venues alongside names like Otis Redding, The Moody Blues, Pink Floyd, The Beatles, The Stones, Spencer Davis, Ben E. King, Aretha Franklin, Cream and countless others.

“ I look back on those times with a fondness that is really hard to explain, we didn't get rich – but that was not the driving force anyway, ”

By then Kennedy Street Enterprises had, alongside the Dawnbreakers other yet unknown acts signed to them – a few of these were The Jaybirds – later to become Ten year's After; The John Evan's Smash – later to become Jethro Tull; The Farinas – later to become Family and The Warriors – later to become Yes!

Two more Butlins seasons followed, the next at Filey and the last at Ayr

The same year a young, good looking guy, from a local Scarborough band called 'The Mandrakes' came regularly to watch our band. This guy was the lead singer, ten years later he formed a band with Elkie Brooks called Vinegar Joe and then later went on a solo career, his name – Robert Palmer!

After a particularly grilling three months in Frankfurt where we played six hours a day, seven days a week, The Dawnbreakers finally split up amicably in mid 1968. I took a job as assistant manager of a large record store in Leeds which only lasted a few months before I took on a job as route compiler for the AA in Leeds. By then had I married Jean Wallis in Spring 1968 and we were living in a council maisonette in the suburbs.

Jean had always worked in a record store since leaving school. However the music bug never really left me and we formed another band just for our own entertainment, rehearsing twice a week in a local hall. In the meantime I began to write songs and soon, surprise, surprise we were back out on the road again, much to Jean's dismay – but I still kept my job!

In 1968 I finished writing a song called 'Magician' and we were convinced that this was the 'biggie'!

Decca Records also thought so and it was released in the Spring of 1969. All the band, then known as 'The Amazing Friendly Apple', had agreed that, if the single failed, we would quit for good. It failed and we did just that, however both sides of the single have since been re-released on album & CD compilations so someone must have thought it worthwhile. In 1976 a friend rang me to say that New Musical Express writers & DJ's had voted the single as number 3 in the 'All-time Psychedelic Charts' – fame indeed!

I look back on those times with a fondness that is really hard to explain, we didn't get rich – but that was not the driving force anyway, we didn't even take drugs and, for that matter, didn't really know any other bands who were really into them. However, I probably learned more about life and ladies than any school could have ever taught me. And all these fond memories are still here with me today.

Chapter 3

The sound of koi.

It was just after the band finally split up that my fortunes took a change for the better. We were contacted by HMV Records to say they were looking for a husband & wife team to open up a branch of HMV in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, prior to this their stores were only around the London area. We went to London for the interview and got the job after determining that our joint earnings could secure us our own house – a dream we never thought possible back then.

We moved up there to Newcastle and the small store was a huge success, by then I was 27 and the increase in salary also allowed me to take driving lessons – a car was another thing we never, ever dreamed of owning!

In November 1970 we were offered to move to Manchester to open and manage the first 'HMV Superstore' right in the prime site on the main shopping street. We came down, looked, said 'Yes' and, by Christmas 1970 we were moved into the house in Bury, Lancashire where I have lived since then.



The store was opened one week before Christmas 1970 in a prime location on Market Street, Manchester's busiest shopping area.

**The opening day at the Manchester store.
(Picture taken with HMV M.D. Bob Boast.)**

After getting the store organized and running properly with a team of very specialist staff who were all experts in their fields, HMV Manchester became a branch where many of the 'new-age' managers (University graduates) were sent to me for training as HMV continued to expand their outlets and their image.

In the same way as I enjoyed every minute of being on stage, the experience of running a record store was almost as enjoyable and the music, combined with the magic of the '70's made every day a new experience. Free tickets to all the major rock concerts, free samples of all the new albums – what more could an ageing hippie require?

The house we moved into had a large back garden and, after moving in, we had the whole area clad with turf and, initially concentrated on decorating the house interior.

By the following spring I knew I had to acquire a lawn mower that could handle the task of cutting the grass, by the time summer came all my weekends were taken up with mowing grass and disposing of the cuttings.

“ I must point out here and now that, prior to starting upon this venture, I had never once heard the word ‘Koi’ ever before! ”

After this had become a major chore my mind turned to incorporating a large ornamental pond in the garden together with rocks and waterfalls and fountains etc. etc. I reasoned that any reduction in grass cutting would be a turn for the better. I had always asked my father to let me have a fish pond at home but he had always, in turn, refused – now I could make my own decisions freely!

In Spring 1972 I made my decision to build the pond and avidly purchased magazines to find out how to make sure it would be perfect.

I must point out here and now that, prior to starting upon this venture, I had never once heard the word ‘Koi’ ever before!

For those who own or have read my first book ‘Koi Kichi’ you will know the next part. But for those who have not, this is how I took my first, small, unwitting steps down the very long road that would, eventually, lead me to another, even more enjoyable occupation, namely that of becoming a Koi dealer!

The fish keeping magazines of the day all had lovely colour pictures in them where one could see goldfish basking by the side of lily leaves together with more beautiful plants and meandering streams ending in a magnificent waterfall which splashed its endless supply of sparkling water back into the pond.

I mentioned all this to a friend in the record business who could not, along with my wife, understand why suddenly, all my conversations had turned to my proposed pond as opposed to my thoughts on the new guitarist in ‘Poco’ and the next big concert to come along!

This friend, however, knew a thing or two about where to go to see real ponds, and, the following Sunday we found ourselves bound for Stapeley in Cheshire where he said the best garden ponds were all on permanent display at the hallowed ‘Stapeley Water Gardens’ centre.

As a point of interest, to get from my house to Stapeley, in those days, the quickest way was via the A580 (East Lancs. Road) – that was the very first time I had driven along that road and I must have passed within a whisker of where my Koi shop would be situated some 7 years later. At the time of writing this I have travelled that same road each day for almost 25 years - spooky!

“ Each pond had a sign giving names, sizes and prices of all these different fish and I just gawped in amazement when I saw that some of the goldfish cost over £5.00 each! ”

I still remember vividly my first visit to Stapeley, right from parking the car to racing over to the entrance. The place was enormous by any standards (since then it has expanded beyond belief).

The owner had built outdoor fish ponds by making a rectangle of old railway sleepers and lining them with plastic or butyl rubber before filling them with water. These ponds contained all kinds of fish from wild fish such as tench, rudd and roach through to coloured fish like golden orfe, golden tench and many different types and sizes of goldfish.

Each pond had a sign giving names, sizes and prices of all these different fish and I just gawped in amazement when I saw that some of the goldfish cost over £5.00 each!

The large indoor showroom contained just about everything one would need for building a pond and keeping fish within the pond. Items from all kinds of pond linings, plastic waterfalls, pumps, fountains, hoses, net covers to keep leaves out, fish nets, fish foods, planting baskets and the adjoining outdoor area displaying variety after variety of water plants.

In the words of the song –

**‘I was like a one-eyed cat peepin’
in a seafood store’!**

My friend pointed out to me a sign which advertised ‘The Stapeley Water Gardens Pond Catalogue on sale here priced at £1.00 - All you’ll ever need to know about building your Garden Pond.’

Needless to say I bought the booklet, had another quick look around and returned home. By the end of that day I could recite the whole thing backwards, in fact, I was getting to be my own authority on garden fish ponds!

The single most attractive thing for me was the heading in the booklet which said ‘Your very own fish pond in a Weekend’ and it gave step-by-step ways of achieving this by means of black & white photographs for all the stages start to finish. On separate pages it gave pond shapes together with accessory packages that could be purchased in order to complete the pond at a fixed price depending on the size of the pond and the quality of the items in the package.

For example one ‘designed’ the pond shape by hosepipe forming it to the shape that pleased you and fitted in with your garden. One then pegged out the shape and measured maximum length and breadth and then decided how deep you wished it to be as well as how wide the planting shelf would be.

After this one returned to Stapeley, armed with dimensions, and picked up one's liner and then ordered one's 'package' to collect after the liner had been positioned, the pond edging had been completed and the pond filled with water for several days. I did exactly this as instructed and ordered 'Pond Pack C' or similar, this gave me items such as one lily complete with basket and fertiliser sachet; five kinds of marginal plants and baskets; 5 strands of oxygenating plants complete with weights; an 'Otter' submersible pump with waterfall and fountain attachment; five 3" goldfish; five 3" Golden Orfe; and, finally three 3" tench as the all-important 'scavenger' fish needed.

In all, it set me back some £350.00, modest by today's standards, but nearer £4,000.00 by 1972 standards! The pond was around 20' x 15' x 2' deep and it took many weekends before I was finally ready to collect my eagerly-awaited 'Pond Pack C' – but, what the heck, it was worth it. My virgin garden pond was now the envy of all my neighbours and they were as eager as I was to put the final touches to it!

The great day arrived and I drove back home at a very modest speed in order not to 'stress' my new pets. I carefully floated the small bags on the surface of the crystal clear pond in order to equalise water temperature whilst my friend was carefully putting all the plants into baskets and placing them on my shelf nine inches below water level. I then began to unpack my brand new Otter pump and had to wade in to the pond in order to connect the outlet to the waterfall hose and set the fountain head as per the instructions. Friends and neighbours were waiting with bated breath, they were asking me as to why I was doing this and that and I carefully explained to them, by now they knew I was almost of 'expert' status!

One asked what the thing was in front of the pump and I patiently explained it was 'a filter' to keep the water clear (I'd read the booklet thoroughly), I then answered other questions with single words such as 'Marginals'; 'Scavengers' and other very important things – even my wife was beginning to think I knew something after all!

After a further 30 minutes wait I carefully undid the plastic bags and eased the nine new pets into their luxury home where the scavengers promptly disappeared from view as they merged into the black of the liner. The others managed to tuck themselves behind planting baskets as I reached for the switch to finally start the pump which would, in turn, commence the waterfall and fountain. Initially nothing happened and all eyes looked quizzically to my direction. I was about to check my wiring when I heard a glug and a gurgle coming from the top of the rockery. After a few seconds the first signs of water started to come down the waterfall and I beamed! I wondered why the fountain was not working and then realised I had not released the valve which controlled it.

“ I sidled my way to the pond to see
a sign above it which read ‘Koi
Carp from Japan’ ”

After another wade into the pond I managed to open the valve which promptly showered me all over, the laughs from the crowd however, did little to deter a real pond keeper. I stood back, sipped a cup of tea and sighed at the beauty before me knowing that as my bible (the booklet) had told me I had successfully built a natural pond in my own garden and all I had left to do now was to sit back & watch it ‘mature’ – yet another word I had absorbed.

All the onlookers said how wonderful it was and I just said ‘Yes, but just wait until it ‘matures’ – then it will be magnificent – they knew I wasn’t a slouch where fish ponds were concerned

OK, there were one or two teething problems, my wife was the first to point out that ‘the water wasn’t level’ and, yes the waterfall was allowing water to spill onto the rockery but these were small points after such a mammoth task. For the rest of the night I couldn’t tear myself away from my new pond, Jean went to bed! At this time I still had never yet seen my first Koi!

On looking out from my bedroom window then next morning I soon realised all was not well with my pond as it appeared to be half empty with my planting baskets completely standing out of the water. I rushed to the pond to find that much more water had been escaping from the watercourse and on to the now, sodden rockery.

I switched off the pump and added water from my garden hose and watched, by the time it was time to go to work the pond was almost back to level so I decided just to have the fountain working until I could re-make the waterfall so it held water. Things seemed to go well for the next few days, the waterfall was attended to, one could see the odd fish here and there and I was at peace with the world.

By then I was already considering building a larger pond somewhere else in the garden and possibly linking both together by means of a stream similar to the one I’d seen at Stapeley. But I decided not to mention the latter to my wife.

However, a few days later my lovely water began to take on a greenish hue and I also discovered a dead goldfish floating on the surface of the pond. I panicked and reached for my booklet to find nothing at all in it about green water. A telephone call to a person at Stapeley soon put my mind at rest when the answer came back that the pond was now beginning to ‘mature’ – silly me!

Some three days later the pond water had the colour of pea green and the texture of thick oil, four more carcasses were removed from the pond surface. The next Sunday I returned to Stapeley for advice and wandered into the showroom where a new display pond was creating much interest from the customers.

I sidled my way to the pond to see a sign above it which read ‘Koi Carp from Japan – New shipment just arrived!’ I finally managed to get a glimpse of the fish swimming in the pond and gasped – it was the first time I had ever seen a Koi!

“

That night and, for the next week or so, I studied each page with relish and decided that, whatever happened, I HAD to keep Koi!

”

I think the first thing that took my breath away was the sheer size of them – some were over 8” long and every one had different colours, some were shiny gold – real gold in colour. I wondered how anyone could produce such beautiful fish and asked an assistant if there was any reading matter available on these ‘Koi Carp’.

The young man produced an A5 hard back book simply called ‘Koi’ which had been written by Roe & Evans. I later found out that the ‘Roe’ was Colin Roe, founder of Shirley Aquatics in Birmingham; I flicked through the pages, bought it and brought it home. That night and, for the next week or so, I studied each page with relish and decided that, whatever happened, I HAD to keep Koi!

By then all the original nine fish in my pond were now swimming in the ‘great pond in the sky’ but my plants were thriving, the water was less green and I was thinking that the time was just right to buy my very first Koi. I found myself back at Stapeley, clutching my new book and wandered over to the pond containing the Koi. There were significantly fewer than were there some two weeks earlier, other people must also find them fascinating I thought.

The same young man came over to me and I asked him how much the Koi in the pond were priced at. His reply was to the point ‘These Koi are £150.00 each, Sir’. I looked at him in total disbelief and asked him to repeat the answer only to find it came out the same.

I thanked him and decided he must be on drugs or something and waited to catch glimpse of the older man who appeared to own the outlet. I finally found him and asked if he could confirm the prices of the Koi as £150.00 each, he gazed thoughtfully at me, the long-haired hippie with flared jeans & platform soles, before him and replied after beckoning the younger assistant & bringing him before me.

He then said to the young man - ‘These are FROM £150.00 each – how many times do I have to tell you?’ The confused young man was about to say something when the older man dismissed him and then said to me - ‘If you point to the one you like I’ll give you a price’. I looked into the pond and said:- ‘I bought this book from you, they all have different names don’t they?’, he shrugged and said ‘Oh if you want to get really into Koi you can go on forever, to me they’re all just Koi’.



I pointed to a picture in the book and asked him if the Koi I was pointing to in the pond was the same as the one in the picture. He nodded and I asked him how you pronounced the name to which he replied 'Assagai, but this one is better than the one in that picture'. 'How much is it?' says I, 'I can do that for £150.00' says he, 'Can I put a deposit on it says I and collect it next week?' - 'OK', says he and before you could say 'Koi' he had my twenty quid in his till!

The next week I had collected my 'Assagai', deciding not to mention the cost of my new acquisition to my wife and the Koi lived quite happily in my pond. I spent nights comparing my 'Assaga'i with the one in the book and, the more I looked, the more I was convinced it was indeed, far better than the one in the book. Perhaps I owned a very, very special 'Assagai' because, as the book said, no two are ever exactly alike!

By mid 1972 I had formed a relationship with the guy who owned the local Aquarium shop in Bury where I bought things for my hobby, he told me I needed more Koi to bring company for my one lonely Koi and my pond, although he had no Koi for sale. He also told me of a new, but expensive book about to come out called 'Koi of the World' by Mr. Herbert Axelrod. He also mentioned that the book must be good as the same man had written many books on just about every variety of fish in the world. I ordered the book from him, which cost £30.00 – in 1972, and this became my next 'bible'!

For the next year or so I believed everything written in that book as the gospel on Koi, only to discover, several years later that this book had been originally written by a Japanese author and sold in Japan under the name of 'Rainbow Carp'.

'Koi of the World' was copied, presumably under licence, after translation, by Axelrod's staff and issued as his own work. Nonetheless, the book was full of interesting photographs of all the major varieties of Koi and, for me, well worth the price paid.

For the entire Summer of '72 I tried, in vain, to get more information on these wonderful fish. I found the odd one or two at some wholesale outlets in the area between 2"-3" long but most died whilst my 'Assagi' continued to thrive.

It was in late 1972 when a friend mentioned to me that an annual Aquarist's Exhibition was to be held in a large hall in Manchester and it may be worth a visit to see if any Koi would be there for sale. We walked in on the opening morning, it certainly was large, enormous in fact. My expectations reduced with every step taken, stand after stand of aquariums, aquarium filters, heaters, live foods, dried foods, tropical, coldwater and marine fish of all shapes & sizes – but no Koi! That was until my friend pointed to the roof of the building right on the back wall where a huge flag had been erected.

On inspection the flag bore the legend 'The British Koi Keeper's Society'.

“ ‘What in God’s name is a Doitsu Yamabuki’?????? ”

I gulped, crossed my fingers and made my way towards the back of the hall. On arrival I could not believe my eyes, there before me was a mock-landscaped garden pond which held the largest and most beautiful Koi I had ever seen in real life. Some were over 14" long and the colours were magnificent, I cannot remember how many there were but I think around twenty five or over. I was salivating but knew I could not afford them, I wondered which millionaire could afford to own a collection such as this.

As I was taking the Koi in, a tall, slim man standing next to the stand was showing an interest in the long-haired 'peace, love & understanding' individual drooling before his stand. He approached me gingerly and in a polite, London accent said 'Excuse me, do you like Koi?' I mentioned a few deadly snippets in return like 'I have a copy of Koi of the World' and watched his reaction which was deadpan.

He then asked if I had a pond and owned any Koi to which I casually replied 'Oh yes, I've been keeping them for a while now, I've got a particularly fine 'Assagai' as a matter of fact.' His eyes looked down into mine and he replied by saying, quite 'matter-of-factly' – 'Assagais are African spears, do you mean you have an Asagi'?

I wished the floor would swallow me up there and then and I knew that the Stapeley man had also no idea how to pronounce the word!

After a few moments I regained my composure and we began to talk about the Koi before us. 'That's gorgeous isn't?' said I. 'Do you like it?' said he, 'I prefer the Doitsu Yamabuki myself, I'd love to have the spare cash available to buy her.'

My new friend walked away smiling knowing I was completely out of my depth as I thought to myself 'What in God's name is a Doitsu Yamabuki'??????

'Are these Koi for sale?' I asked, he replied by saying that the stand was a free stand whereas the other stands were trader's stands which had to be paid for. The Koi could be sold but had to be displayed at the stand until the following afternoon when they could be sold to members of the British Koi Keepers Society first and then to 'outsiders' afterwards.

He also mentioned that all the Koi had been supplied on a 'sale or return' basis by an importer from London, I later learned that the importer was the late Eric Devis whom I was, in later years, to get to know quite well. After asking how much the two Koi I was drooling over would cost and being given the answer of £18.50 and £22.50 I couldn't quite catch my breath – I'd expected thousands of pounds!

My next question was 'How much does it cost to join your Society?' I really cannot remember the cost but I think it was around £3.00 per year for membership, which included a monthly newsletter delivered to one's door. Within seconds I was member number 61 and had also secured the two Koi by a deposit. I shook hands with the man and promised to return the next afternoon to collect them. That weekend I told anyone who cared to listen about my two new-found 'Champions'.

“ ‘Are you sure you know how to keep these things mate?’ ”

Returning the next afternoon we found the show heaving with visitors making or clutching special offer purchases from the aquarium dealer's stands. I made my way to the Koi stand to find that heaving also with many men and women in deep conversation.

As we approached I noticed the tall man whispering something in the ears of a tall, but very large gentleman next to him. By the time I reached the stand the buzz of conversation had reduced significantly – almost to a silence. I paid the tall man the balance of money and he asked me to wait for an hour or so when the show finished before he could let me have my Koi because he needed to keep them on display until the show closed.

Soon afterwards the tall, large, fat man gingerly approached me and said, in a broad Manchester dialect, - ‘Are you sure you know how to keep these things mate?’ I then began to relate my vast experiences in the hobby but he just scowled instead. ‘Bloody outsiders coming here and buying the best ones, I'd have been here yesterday but I had to work instead!’ He was annoyed, I later got to know this guy very well, the legendary Cyril Winterbottom, and discovered that he was always annoyed! I was then, almost reluctantly, introduced to the other members of my society. In later months I discovered that these people were the top Koi keepers in the UK at that time.

In general these people were well-dressed, polite & friendly but my image did not, apparently, fit in with these folks. I tried to apologise humbly by mumbling that my job involved long hair and gaudy clothes but it took many years before they were to realise that I would not turn out to be another ‘flash-in-the-pan’ Koi keeper – one had to pay one's dues back in those days!

The people present on the stand that afternoon, amongst others, were the late Victor Zaczeniuk from Leeds, Phil Searle from Southport, Val Frost from Kent, Barry Rowlinson from Stockport, the late Hilda & Eric Allen from Peterborough, the late Malcolm Waumsley from the South of England, Malcolm & Liz ? (forgot their surname!) and the tall, thin man turned out to be Roland Seal from Stockport together with his wife Pauline. I had no idea then that, over the next few years, I would get to know all these people on first name terms purely through a common addiction to Koi.

Roland Seal however, was ‘THE MAN’. He was the real driving force behind the then, tiny British Koi Keeper's Society. Roland left the hobby in the early 1980's but his input between 1971 to 1978 was the reason for the tremendous growth of membership to over 5,000 members by the time the ‘80's arrived.

Many friends who knew him casually say he was a snob, they say he was rude and also very abrupt, however, that is not my recollection at all.

Roland was a sound engineer for Granada Television and had moved to the North from London to take up his job. It did, however, take time and tact before one could really begin to understand what made him tick.



As far as I know his only other hobby apart from Koi keeping was hi-fi together with jazz & jazz-rock music because of his association with recorded sound. I could help here by keeping him aware of the latest news and releases and we did share a common interest in some music, notably Miles Davis and Weather Report. Roland did much to try and teach me about Koi in those early days, in return I tried to stimulate his musical hobby, more to the point we also got on together more than reasonably well.

I recall, it was the following Sunday after the Manchester show I had been given the first 'invite' to actually visit his house in Stockport and see his pond. Jean & I arrived on time and we were greeted by Roland, Pauline his wife, and their two young sons Mark & Daniel. Their back garden was much smaller than mine but the first time I clapped eyes on his pond I was simply stunned!

Polaroid shot of Roland's pond taken in late autumn 1972 (Pictured Above)

The pond was set on the left-hand side of the rectangular garden and took up two thirds of the entire width and three quarters of the entire length. Jean saw my eyes wide open and discretely shook her head from side to side which said - 'No, don't even think about it!'

My eyes took in many things in an instant but I cannot recall in which order; the Koi were enormous, some just over 17" long, they were absolute giants. The water must have been four feet deep and crystal clear although Roland complained it was dirty.

The pond surround and garden reminded me of Japan and then I watched as Pauline sat by the pond side and began to

feed the Koi shrimps, by hand! I think it was right there and then that my new-found hobby really started to become the next addiction of my life. By today's standards, the pond and the Koi were a total joke but by 1972 standards it was the highest state-of-the-art Koi pond in existence in the UK and both pond and Koi were the joint envy of all members of the Society.

It should be pointed out here and now that these early BKKS members were the real pioneers of the hobby we have today. In those days we all believed that Koi were true cold water fish. Our ponds were all waterproofed by plastic or - if one was really rich - by butyl liners. Plants in one's pond were absolutely vital; filters were generally unheard of; waterfalls & fountains were desirable and many considered them to be vital. The only medicine available was WS3. Koi nets were angler's landing nets. Koi foods were whatever they would eat. Waste matter & debris was removed by siphon or pump – daily, and we were all in the land of superstition and, almost total darkness!

Roland, however, had sussed out some of the problems. He had few plants in his pond but did have the very first real filter I ever saw, this was an 'under gravel' filter copied from an aquarium filter but on a much larger scale.



The first Koi show held outside of Japan was this one, staged in my garden in 1975

He also showed me his version of his 'Koshihara' waste removal system which had been first invented by Dr. Koshihara in Japan whereby a 4" tube was taken through the wall of his liner and fixed into place by gaskets and backing boards. The same tube was taken to the deepest area of the pond where the most debris gathered. The tube exiting the pond was 'stopped' by a screw-fit cap and, when debris built up in the pond, he simply unscrewed the cap and debris & waste water would exit the pond by siphon at a rate of knots! This first version was later to be modified by a standpipe to avoid getting drenched every time one tried to stop the flow, but, for me, this was high-tech indeed!

By the time the winter of '72 came my Koi were looking cold and unhappy – not surprising in a climate much colder than we have now together with a pond now only 18" deep. (The reduction of 6" depth came by way of my first under-gravel filter.) After speaking to many of 'my fellow members', a garden shed was purchased – reasoning to Jean that it was vital for my gardening tools. Once erected, however, it became a perfect housing for four 6' aquariums plus heaters, thermostats, filters and aeration!

My Koi were rescued from their outdoor freezer and kept indoors until the following Spring, by this time I hoped my next pond would be ready for them! The Koi bug had bitten hard, looking back – I often wonder how it was possible that the Manchester HMV store remained top of the league table every single month?

In spring 1973 my first child came into the world namely my daughter Inez. We chose her name as a combination of only two Inez's we knew, one was the wife of the HMV store manager in Glasgow, the other was the lady in the Inez &

Charlie Foxx team who's 1960's single 'It's gonna work out fine' was a favourite of ours. The very moment I brought Inez & her mum back home from the maternity hospital I laid Inez on the floor of our lounge and played 'The Band's' first album – 'Music from Big Pink' – LOUD! Inez carried on sleeping, from that day on we never had to whisper or play music softly whilst Inez was sleeping upstairs! By that time we had built a wall separating the pond from the rest of the garden accessed by a locked gate in preparation for the time Inez would start exploring.

The next pond was commenced in summer '73 to the right of the original pond, behind the wall and in front of the shed/aquarium housing. It was both in and out of ground, butyl-lined, 20' long, 7' wide, 5' deep in one half and 3' deep in the other half which would take the obligatory undergravel filter. It also had – wait for it – A BOTTOM DRAIN in the deep part which was taken via 2" tube to waste!

To add to this, on the advice of Hilda & Eric Allen – legends in the Koi world, a 24" sand filter was installed in my increasingly-smaller shed. The external pump was also sited in the shed which picked up water from the under-gravel network of pipes in the pond and then taken through the sand filter before returning water to the pond. By the time the system was filled I had 2,300 gallons of real 'state-of-the-art' Koi pond and held an open day for the Society to come and marvel at this breakthrough in technology.

All visitors were visibly impressed – save one. Yes, you guessed – Roland!



You see he had just returned from Japan, a visit paid for by the BKKS, and advised me that under-gravel filters were things of the past. Bottom drains to FOUR INCH tube were now IN as were EXTERNAL FILTERS! He also casually mentioned he needed to heat his new pond – not only in winter but also in summer. Jean gave me that warning look yet again – a new outfit for her sprang to mind immediately!

The early to mid '70's saw a 'mish-mash' of ideas come and go together with information that was not in any way substantiated technically or documented. More often than not, if it worked for 'Fred', it must also work for everyone, alas, in most instances this was not the case. To give a few examples:-

1) I re-visited Victor Zaczeniuk's large complex of Koi ponds in Leeds several times and marvelled how he managed to keep so many Koi and also breed his favourite variety (Shusui) very successfully. His rear gardens were totally taken over by water and Koi and, whilst the Koi were not really special, they were certainly healthy. After about three visits he took me into his conservatory, poured me a drink and confided to me the secrets of his success. Victor, the extrovert, looked me in the eyes and then spoke in his hushed Hungarian accent, - 'Peter, you vil neffer 'av good kois until you 'av the secret'. He then led me down to his locked outhouse next to his main house and opened the door with his key and then switched on the lights. The entire room was stacked from floor to ceiling with cardboard cartons full of tins of processed peas! Victor looked at me and then said quietly – 'Now I 'gif' you my special secret, 'peeze' is ze ONLY food for kois! Before I left he made me promise I would feed processed peas to my Koi or he would never tell me any more of his secrets. I looked at the bottom of his ponds which were covered with a mass of white, empty pea shells that the Koi had spit out and realised then why all his Koi had taken on this perfect rugby ball shape. Victor's Koi were certainly healthy but he had no concern whatsoever that they were not Koi-shaped. Whenever we spoke after that he asked me if I still fed 'ze peeze' – I lied and said I did – I would never dare to say anything else to him!!!

“ Usually the topics were to do with blanket weed problems, so-called ‘Spring Sickness’, which choice of pump to buy etc. etc ”

2) Cyril Winterbottom lived high up in a large block of flats in north Manchester with his wife. His Koi pond was a large cold frame on the land surrounding the flats which he had taken as his own land and no-one dared to argue with him. When he finally allowed me to see his pond I found it secured by steel bars and locks to prevent local youths from getting access. When I went into his flat Cyril showed me his chair where he sat to watch his television, the chair gave Cyril a perfect window view of his pond many floors below. Next to his chair stood a loaded 410 shotgun which he would have no hesitation in using should anyone attempt to interfere with his special Koi!

3) I remember going to one of the first Koi Society meetings I attended, this particular one was held in Leeds and enthusiasts from all over the country travelled for miles to attend as these meetings were the only real ways of obtaining any snippets of further knowledge. Usually the topics were to do with blanket weed problems, so-called ‘Spring Sickness’, which choice of pump to buy v. etc. This meeting, however, was given by an expert on parasites, I remember at that meeting sitting next to Hilda Allen who, together with her husband Eric had originally formed the B.K.K.S. A small glass aquarium was passed around us all containing two goldfish that were ‘HEAVING’, with anchor worm which only a few of us had ever seen before. I looked at Hilda and said ‘What else do we have to put up with?’ – That was the very first time I had ever seen an anchor worm!

Roland Seal's first BKKS-sponsored trip to Japan in 1975 (flight only) was made during May of that year. Before this visit, we UK enthusiasts really believed that millions of Koi were available everywhere in Japan all year round.

This is what we were told by way of snippets in fish-keeping magazines and whispers from other enthusiasts. Furthermore we thought that all we needed to do was simply get there and all our wildest Koi dreams would be brought to fruition immediately after our feet touched Japanese soil.

Roland's detailed report on his first visit however, did not really confirm what we had been told in the past. His visit was sponsored in part by Kamihata Fish Industries Ltd. who provided a guide for part of the trip by way of their Chiba office manager namely Naoji Takanashi who spoke excellent English.

Whilst Kamihata were huge in the import to Japan - tropical and marine species, Mr. Kamihata himself was also very interested in Koi and his company had experience in packing and shipping Koi to a few overseas countries already, despite the fact that it was a very risky business back then.

Because Kamihata had no idea as to what ‘level’ of wealth Roland possessed they assumed, wrongly, that he was a man of some great importance especially as he was selected as the sole representative of The British Koi Keeper's Society. Even by then the BKKS and Zen Nippon Airinkai (the leading Japanese Koi enthusiast's society) were ‘sister societies’.

As a result Roland was chaperoned and escorted around the finest Koi ponds and gardens in Japan all owned by prominent and incredibly-wealthy members of ZNA. Their homes were opened to Roland where he was treated

to lavish luncheons daily and many evening banquets in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Himeji and Nagoya. Leading collectors of the day were the likes of Tsuchiya; Kamiya; Dr. Dodo; Anabuki and others who all jovially vied with each other as to their personal wealth and very impressive collections of Koi – all maintained daily by servants and local Koi dealers. Roland was showered with expensive gifts from these collectors which he proudly showed us all on his return displayed on shelves in his house.

The truth of the matter was that this visit was to learn more about the Koi themselves as well as the breeding and keeping methods and to pass this information to us via the society magazine.

Roland was a working man with a young family just like most of us were back then, his total 'wealth' on that visit was a hard-saved £100.00 in cash. His last night's meal in a hotel near Narita airport consisted of two packets of potato crisps and he then had to wait for the meals to be served on the return flight to the UK. His wife Pauline collected him at Heathrow airport with 3 pence to his name!



Shortly after Roland returned I grabbed a June weekend away in London to Wembley Stadium to a very special event. Asylum Records paid for the entire weekend including travel, hotels and incredible VIP seats for both days.

The weather was superb as was the atmosphere of the event which was a complete sell-out. The sound could have been better but these were still early days for open air venues.

In the evenings we had meals in the hotel and shared drinks in the bar with Paul and Linda McCartney and their young family who ran riot in the bar.

There were rumours that Jackson Browne would make a guest appearance with the Eagles during their spot. He did just that – truly memorable!

I kept this programme of the event and still have it today – safe. It is said to be quite valuable for rock music collectors! (Pictured above)

“ ‘You’ll never see ME moving MY precious Koi to any Koi show’ etc. ”

As to Roland’s ‘Japan report’ to us, he’d taken photographs and made notes and sketches of everything he’d witnessed over there. Some of these items were:-

- Koi of a quality and size that could not be imagined – many exceeded 24" (60cms) and a few were even 28" (71cms). In 1975, a Koi in the UK was classed as ‘enormous’ at 14" (36cms).
- All the ponds he’d seen were made of concrete as were the ‘external’ filters that all used ‘Zeolite’ as a filter media. This was the very first time we had heard the mention of this material and all our ponds then had under-gravel ‘in-pond’ filters, furthermore our ponds were all formed by liners. On his return, Roland started to excavate and build the first concrete external Koi pond filters in the UK.
- Although he had been taken to see many Koi dealer’s outlets where hundreds of superb Koi were on offer, many collectors commented to him that the best Koi in Japan were only to be found in Niigata Prefecture at certain times of the year. The Koi he had seen at these dealer’s outlets had all been bred and grown in a mountainous area that surrounded Ojiya City but was not so easy to access. This was the first time I had heard mention of this area, soon afterwards I found ‘Niigata Prefecture’ on a map and gazed at it in pure wonder.
- Roland then mentioned to me that, in order to ‘get up to speed’ with our Japanese counterparts we needed to hold Koi shows in the UK to promote our hobby of keeping Koi to many others who had never even heard the word mentioned before.

As I recall, this very first Koi show ever held outside of Japan by the Northern Section of the BKKS (then the largest section in the society) was thought of, planned, hurriedly advertised in the BKKS magazine and staged in my own back garden in a time period of some nine short weeks from start to completion!

We only had pictures from some Japanese Koi magazines to go on and several evening meetings took place where we discussed ‘show ponds’, aeration, water supply, water testing, promised entries to the show, judges, return oxygen, refreshments, travel directions etc. etc.

Even then we had several opponents, the ones who firmly stated ‘You’ll never see ME moving MY precious Koi to any Koi show’ etc.

The budget we had in which to do this from the funds of the Northern Section was £75.00! After much discussion we chose plastic-coated wire garden edging formed in circles and tied to form the outer supports of the ‘ponds’. These 36" diameter circles were lined with transparent blue polythene inserts cut to size and trimmed after filling with 12" of water. One of our members loaned us a worthy but noisy compressor that we had to make a manifold for the main outlet to take yards of aquarium airline and air valves. The lines were laid carefully on the lawn, pushed down with metal staples and ended with a ball air stone in each pond to produce a few bubbles.

“ He looked at me and, very quietly, ”
said – ‘The fish are lovely, I just
don’t like people!’

I had to clear it all with my very friendly neighbours in advance by inviting them round for refreshments on the day. We knew in advance that members were travelling from all parts of the UK to attend. Some broke their journeys by booking overnight accommodation nearby for the Saturday evening. Two even travelled by private helicopter from Cornwall! Others had 500 mile return car journeys to make in order to attend. My wife and other ladies from the section prepared endless trays of sandwiches, salads, pies, cakes and other snacks at home and brought them early on the Sunday morning. My house was open as public toilet, cloakroom and a resting area if needed for the day.

We borrowed a large water boiler for the day to provide hot drinks and had ample supplies of cold drinks on hand.

Thankfully, on the day, the weather was perfect, bright September sunshine and only a slight but welcome breeze. We started taking entries from 7.30am when local members arrived to place their entries in the pond/s reserved for them. I am not certain but I think we had 30 ponds in total and three entry sizes measured by an 18” ruler! My two ponds and Koi were to the rear of the garden where many visitors spent some of their time relaxing during the show.

Yes, it was a hectic day that exceeded all advance expectations. It was amazing to see over 100 Koi enthusiasts descending on my garden and all of them with just one thing that brought them all there – Koi!

I was playing tapes of soft, summer background music from Neil Young; Jackson Browne; Eagles; Steely Dan and some Little Feat – just in case anyone felt too sleepy in the sun.

I do recall a very quiet, hermit-like individual who lived alone on his fish farm in Devon attending that day. He was built like a pencil with long grey hair tied behind his head and clad in the strangest attire. He bred all kinds of coarse fish on his farm and was intent on producing high quality Koi. Several people tried to speak with him without luck – he just walked away from everyone.

In the afternoon he slowly came over to me and said ‘Toilet?’ – I pointed him in the right direction and then asked ‘Are you enjoying the show?’ He looked at me and, very quietly, said – ‘The fish are lovely, I just don’t like people!’

Thankfully the rest of us had a ball studying and commenting to each other as to the entries before us. Then followed serious discussions, such as - the best pumps to buy; the best way to make filters; how to remove green water; the best Koi foods available and other subjects of great importance only to the pioneering Koi keepers of our land.

Judging commenced at 1.00pm with Roland, Val Frost and Peter Reynolds armed with paperwork and it all seemed to be taken very seriously – especially by the entrants who were all trying to listen-in to the odd comment made loudly by the judges!

At 4.00pm we had the results announced and the winners were awarded their prize certificates.

Every entrant was also presented with a signed card to commemorate entry to the truly groundbreaking event.

THE BRITISH KOI-KEEPERS' SOCIETY

(Affiliated F.B.A.S., F.N.A.S.)

錦鯉

NORTHERN SECTION OPEN SHOW

This is to commemorate that

P. Waddington

Exhibited Koi at the Open Show of The British Koi-Keepers' Society organised by
The Northern Section, on 21st September, 1975

W. R. Seal

Chairman-Secretary Northern Section

And here's mine from 34 years ago! (Pictured above)

It did not all go smoothly though – what Koi show ever does?

The ever-vociferous, fiery and very large Cyril Winterbottom tore his certificate up in front of us all because his prized 'Kumonryu' he'd bought for £2.50 from a doubtful aquarium shop did not take any award from the 'useless judges'!

- (Cyril had commandeered my precious 'Koi of the World' book before the show and decided that the nearest picture therein to his valuable 'find' was Kumonryu variety – and, for Cyril, that's exactly what it was – the book does not lie!)

However, there were many of us who opined it was a small, wild leather carp – but none dare even consider mentioning this to Cyril. Cyril threw his torn-up certificate over my garden fence only to watch my next-door neighbour throw it straight back at him!

It was also very encouraging to see the visitors after the show holding conversations with the judges as to why certain Koi took some awards and others received nothing. Many ponds were re-visited and many points explained in detail to very interested enthusiasts.

As to the quality of the entries - if one was to see the very same Koi on display today they would only raise frowns and questions such as 'Home bred?' – but, in truth, these were some of the finest Koi in the UK at that time and we were in no doubt that things could only get better!

'From small things mamma, big things one day come'.

After we all broke down the show that warm evening and cleared everything away, we all sat outside on a wall and sipped a few beers. We all agreed that everything had gone well, the visitors could not thank us enough for 'a wonderful experience' and all drove or 'flew' away happy. The usually reserved 'boss-man' Roland even seemed very happy with the outcome but no-one thought or mentioned that the day would become a landmark day in the UK Koi hobby. A few days later we learned that not one single Koi had been damaged or lost either to or from the show. There is no doubt at all that this hastily-staged event produced the necessary 'kick up the backside' for the hobby as enthusiasm for 'Koi Carp' in the UK started to grow at a rate of knots.



The show also produced some repercussions along with new members and the glory. Back then, 'The Northern Section of the BKKS' covered the areas of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire and just about all parts north. Sunday monthly section meetings were alternated at different venues in various counties and, as membership grew, some leading members became dissatisfied with the long distances involved in travel to the meetings. Expected breakaway groups formed in some areas, one of which became independent of the BKKS and named itself 'The Yorkshire Koi Society' and began to stage its own Koi shows at Harewood House near Leeds. It is still going strong today with its own website.

As the hobby began to grow throughout the UK, more BKKS sections were formed and more breakaway groups started independent Koi Societies. There was no doubt that the main council of the BKKS seriously frowned upon these breakaway societies. By mid-1976 the word 'politics' became to be mentioned more and more in 'Koi conversations'.

My allegiances were always with the BKKS and, for that matter, they still are.

During the 1970's, the pilgrimage to the annual AGM in Leicester was an event never to be missed. Some passed without a murmur whilst others produced near fisticuffs! Although we never saw it at the time, the membership was becoming far too big and boisterous for those stalwarts who first guided it through the formative years.

Around 1976, I received an unexpected 'phone call from someone I had never met before, he told me that his name was Paul Holgate and he wanted to get involved in Koi and come around to see me as soon as possible. I agreed and gave him all my address details and a few evenings later he showed up in a shiny new Volvo estate car – very expensive in those days!

I shook hands with Paul, who seemed to be a very 'likely lad' and then took him to see my ponds and Koi. PAUL WAS INSTANTLY, AND UTTERLY 'BLOWN AWAY'! Once he had taken them all in, he BEGGED me to go to his house in Oldham and design him a 'proper' Koi pond and he, personally, would build it himself. Sometime later, I did just that.

Paul was a total joker and owned a few fish and chip shops in and around Oldham but we got on together really great – especially with Koi!

We became very close friends but he kept asking me question after question Koi keeping and soon I begged him to join the BKKS – which he did, immediately!

Within a few months he had soaked in SO much knowledge about Koi – just through his avid enthusiasm.

In later years, around 1983, Paul became so involved with Koi that he decided to become a full-time pond builder and asked me to dream up a name for his company. I came up with name of 'PERFECT PONDS' and Paul has stuck with that ever since.

I have not seen Paul for many years now but still consider him as a close friend – he is also VERY talented!



Back in those days, the BKKS only had a monthly newsletter which was posted to all the members and I can remember that I was always anxiously waiting for it to arrive on my doorstep. On one particular lunchtime in Manchester, Roland and I were taking a sandwich and some tea, when Roland suggested that I should write some articles for our newsletter – I was amazed, but said I would see what I could come up with. I started that very same night, writing in longhand – that is when my hands were not as 'shaky' as they are today!

I managed to produce, over the years, many articles for the BKKS magazine entitled 'RAMBLINGS' and they were both printed in the monthly newsletter, together with cartoons, as well as in the annual BKKS show magazine – and, from the mail received by me, over the years, from the readers, they have seemed to be well-enjoyed.

It was about 1976 when I first tried to breed Nishikigoi – wow, that was hard work and there were no financial rewards at all!

**Some of my fry approx. 2" long around early August 1976.
(Pictured above)**

I started breeding them in June and by September had some 300 4" Koi for sale – after driving to a secret local pond to me to collect daphnia daily it became very hard work indeed.

In September, at Tatton Park, in Cheshire I took my baby Koi to sell at an average price between £4.00 to £6.00 each and managed to sell quite a few, but not nearly enough to cover my costs!

In, and around early 1977, I was asked if I would accept a nomination to join the newly-formed BKKS Judging and Standards Team (JSC) but I had misgivings because I knew I would have to wear a shirt and tie, and a blazer and pressed trousers, together with black, highly polished shoes. It would ruin my image as an ageing hippie – YUCK! I did however attend most of the formative meetings of the team

Chapter 3

Japan the art of koi.

Also in 1977, I made my first trip to Japan – my dream had come true at last! I looked forward for months to experiencing my first long-haul flight but tried to forget the price I paid for an economy return ticket at £1,200.00! The trip was organised by the BKKS and led by Roland Seal, there were around 25 enthusiasts in total. We flew with KLM who were offering the cheapest price at the time and our hotel expenses could be reduced if we shared a room with another person – I applied for that option and met my room-mate at Heathrow for the first time. Tom Nichols was a wonderful person from Hampshire and, as the trip progressed we became good friends on the trip itself and for many years afterwards. It was only in later years that Tom mentioned that he was seriously alarmed on meeting me for the first time as he was convinced I was gay!



KLM certificate which verified my first flight over the North Pole.

It was a truly hectic visit as we travelled to Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and finally to Niigata – the main reason for my visit.

We were all greeted as royalty by the wealthy ZNA members who were prominent in the hobby in those days and each tried to out-do the other by laying on special banquets in our honour.

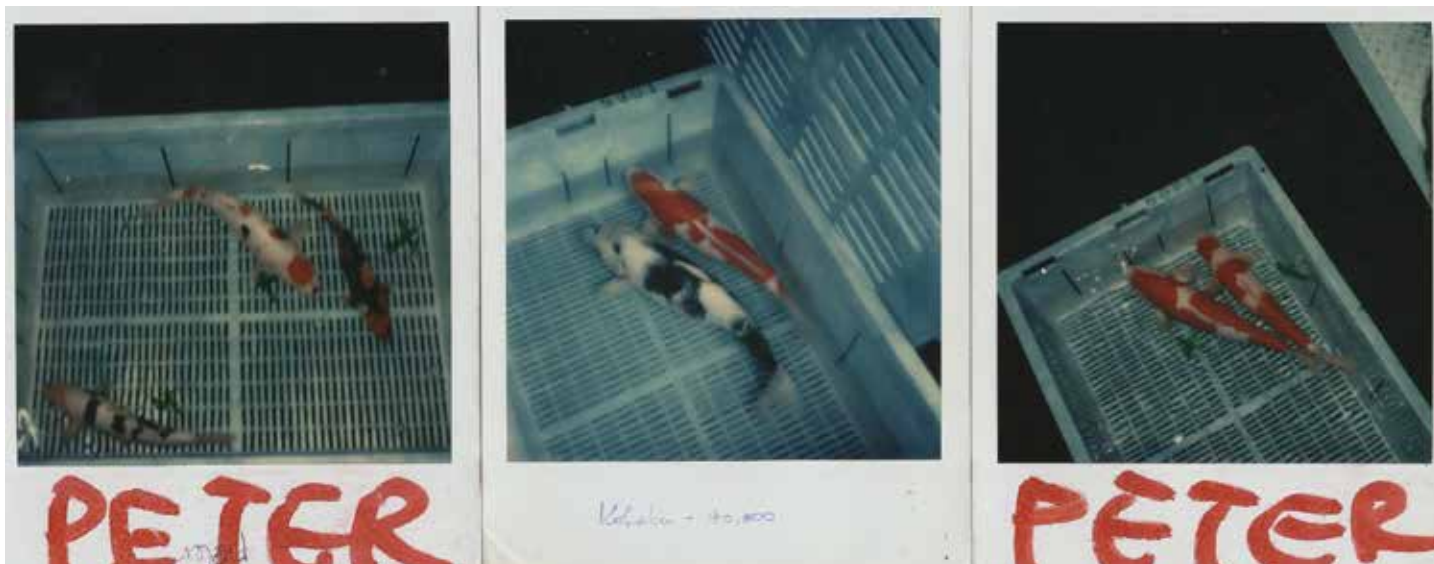
We were escorted around member's ponds and also taken to many local Koi dealers who were all eager to present us with their business cards. The Koi they had on offer were simply incredible and many were eagerly purchased by our

party. Whilst the flight to Japan was incredibly expensive, the complete reverse was true regarding the exchange rate. Our one pound sterling bought 1,000 yen – at the time of writing this, our one pound today only buys 125 yen!

In short, back in those days we were 'rich' in Japan and the Koi purchased were incredibly cheap, hence the significant numbers purchased by the members on that trip. I was determined to save my money until I got to Niigata but just could not resist the temptation and purchased many superb Koi in Osaka and Kyoto. All I wanted to see every day was Koi, Koi and more Koi, I felt I was in some kind of a wonderland.



Evening reception hosted by ZNA members in Kyoto 1977. (I'm at the back row around centre.)



We all took photographs and made many notes regarding ponds and filtration systems we had seen daily. All our conversations were made via our interpreter who had never seen Koi before our visit!

These Polaroids above were a few Koi purchased in central Japan. Back in 1977 this class of Koi had never been seen before anywhere in the UK. (Pictured above)

Right – Our evening visit to Mr. Tsuchiya's famous 'rooftop pond' at the Sanyo Securities building in the centre of Tokyo. (Pictured below)



Despite all of the attention we were getting by way of our very wealthy friends together with many purchases of some superb Koi I knew I would have to wait patiently for our last four days of the visit in order to be able to realise my dream of visiting Niigata Prefecture.

The day finally came and we found ourselves with eyes wide open and Niigata-bound at last. Back then there were no bullet train lines or freeways from Tokyo to Niigata so we had to make the nine hour journey over huge and seemingly endless mountain ranges to Niigata by coach. The main road, which is still there today, had roadside food outlets and toilet facilities every 20 kilometres or so where we made many stops to take in the wonderful mountain scenery after we had long since departed from the flat countryside of Tokyo and Saitama. For me, the nine hour journey seemed to take much longer than that because I was so impatient to get there.

Our interpreter announced that we were almost on the outskirts of Ojiya City but, by then, it was pitch black outside. The coach drove through the silent city centre which had a few lights here and there and slowly we left Ojiya to climb upwards into the mountains ahead where our Japanese Inn rested.

The Inn was named 'Jo-ganji' and the lady owner was waiting patiently to greet us all. On arrival we found a welcome buffet meal awaiting us together with an endless supply of cold beer. By then it was 10.00pm and a few of us went outside with beer in hand to try and get a glimpse of the traditional gardens and Koi ponds that surrounded the Inn.

We did not manage to see the grounds that night but we did sit down near the entrance to the Inn to take in the wonderful air and 'listen' to the incredible silence that surrounded us. We all voted for an early start the next morning and most of the party retired to their futons for the first time ever.

For me, it was hard to get to sleep that night. I reckon it was around 2.00am I became thirsty and needed water. I went over to the room refrigerator and found small bottles that looked like cold water. I took the foil lid from a bottle and almost downed it in one before realising it was not water.

Too late, it was Sake, my mouth felt like it was on fire for a moment but it soon brought an end to my insomnia – I slept like a log!

At 7.00am we were ready to board the coach after a light breakfast at the Inn and a quiet stroll around some of the gardens. Our Inn was an isolated oasis nestled deep in the surrounding mountainsides and we could only dream of what lay ahead of us. We were armed with just about everything, cameras, early video recorders, notepads, pens and we waited patiently as the coach driver started up the engine. I really do not know what I was expecting as we drove through some beautiful mountain scenery but I knew I was in Niigata at last.

After only 10 minutes or so we drove onto a wider road with a few roadside houses and the driver stopped to allow two Japanese guys onto the coach. Our interpreter announced that these would be our Koi guides for the day and one spoke very good English, we were also advised that both were real Koi experts.

That day we were 'guided' to some Koi outlets but passed many more with Koi signs on their houses than those we stopped at and I became a little 'guarded' after realising this. True, I didn't know where I was and names of people and villages were extremely difficult to write, remember or pronounce but I soon understood that we were not given the freedom of the area as I previously was led to believe.

Having said this, it did not spoil the experience for me because the beauty of the area combined with ancient houses, un-made roads and tracks, huge rock escarpments, traditional people going about their traditional labours dressed in traditional clothing and a real feeling of 'being at home' only led to me promising myself that, one day I would return to this area – alone.

I asked one of our guides later that day where we were and he replied with one single word – 'Yamakoshi'. That was the very first time I had ever heard that name in my life. I stopped and asked him to spell the name for me and I wrote it down in capital letters.

There were few display ponds by the roadside and many breeders kept their stocks in small, unfiltered concrete ponds next to their mud ponds. This involved tramping across rice fields in order to inspect the stocks. Other larger outlets could only be reached by foot from the single track narrow road our coach could drive on.



I knocked on the door and the terrified interpreter shakily stood some six feet behind me.



Having said this, the class of Koi that were eventually found were better than any we had seen at dealer outlets in the other parts of Japan.

The first Japan trip I went on in my life did not, however, go without incidents. One day we were at the extremely lavish Miyaishi Koi farm and dwelling house where I spotted a pond with small Nissai in it (8" to 10" long) and asked the price. Miya San quoted me the price of one only which was expensive, but the Koi looked superb.

I then asked him if he would make a substantial discount to me if I bought twenty of them and he agreed to do so. There were some 350 Koi in the pond and, after two hours of selecting, I finally had 20 Koi in the bowl.

By then, most of the rest of the party were in Mr. Miya's house taking sandwiches and drinks for lunch. I called to Mr. Miya and took him to see my selection; he glanced over them and said to our interpreter that he would give me a further 5% discount on the original price he had quoted for a single one!

I was utterly disgusted and told the interpreter to tell Mr. Miya there was no deal and then walked away. I walked away, down the road, to a place I later learned was Torazo and bought some wonderful Koi at wonderful prices.

Later that night our interpreter received a 'phone call to our hotel from Mr. Miya who advised her that he would not release any Koi to the rest of our party, who had bought and paid for them from him, unless I paid him a 10% cancellation fee! The rest of the party were visibly concerned so I decided, in the cold, dark night air, to pay him a visit. Our interpreter agreed to come along and we took a taxi there and eventually reached the house where I knocked on the door and the terrified interpreter shakily stood some six feet behind me.

Soon, Mr. Miya and his brother opened the door with their arms firmly folded across their chests. I asked our interpreter to tell them that I wanted to tell them that they were crooks but she was too frightened to do that.

In the end, I gave them their 10% bribe money but I have NEVER bought a single Koi from Miyaishi ever since that first meeting.

It would be another five years before I learned the truth of the matter which was that Mr. Miya had 'sponsored' the cost of our coach and driver. However, his guides would only take the coach to the breeders who had agreed, in advance, to pay Mr. Miya a hefty commission on their sales to our party of innocent and completely 'captured' overseas Koi buyers – with pockets full of money.

Our guides who did pass on some good information about Koi escorted us very closely around the mountainsides for the entire four days but we were far from being free in going where we wished to go!

“

‘No, English.’ He looked puzzled
until a younger guy shouted
‘Eegerisu’ followed by ‘Beatles’!
We both smiled and nodded in
agreement.

”

One evening I mentioned to Roy Winterbourne, another member of the party that it may make an interesting change to take a taxi into the nearest town for a few drinks and an evening meal in order to experience different foods and to check out the nightlife. The lady at the Inn asked the taxi driver to take us to the nearest city centre and off we drove in the darkness.

Around 15 minutes later we stopped outside the main entrance to a large and modern hotel, it was then 7.00pm. We paid the driver after he’d pointed to the hotel and said, in perfect English – ‘Grand Hotel’. As he drove away we took our bearings and decided to take a walk around keeping the hotel position in mind.

This was not difficult as all the roads and side roads were built in square blocks which were easy to follow. Within minutes the modern hotel and its grounds were left for us to pass into ancient streets, shops and bars that were all built from aged wood. It gave us both an impression of a Wild West town in the days of the early Clint Eastwood films.

The narrow pavements protected everyone from the weather by having well-worn wooden verandas fixed to the buildings. There were small bars everywhere with neon signs and food menus outside displaying pictures of what was on offer inside. We entered one at random after peeping through the glass door and, as we walked in, all heads turned to inspect us. We

went over to the bar and ordered two beers then sat down to take in our surroundings. The lager beer was cold and refreshing so we relaxed and started talking about Koi and our daily experiences in Yamakoshi.

As we finished our first beer, the bar man looked over and said – ‘Beere?’ I nodded and two more beers were brought over, as he put them on the table he looked at us and said ‘American?’, we shook our heads and said ‘No, English.’ He looked puzzled until a younger guy shouted ‘Eegerisu’ followed by ‘Beatles’! We both smiled and nodded in agreement.

The young guy came over and sat down with us, he explained that he studied English at high school and that it was very rare to see foreigners visiting Nagaoka. We explained we did not know where we were apart from being in Niigata. He then wrote the name ‘Nagaoka’ down for us, then we explained that we came here to find Koi to take back home for our ponds. He looked puzzled and asked me to write the word down so I did. He looked at it and said, loudly - ‘Koi?’ and made a swimming motion with his hands – we both smiled and nodded.

The barman then shouted ‘Nishiki-go!’ and then the young man smiled and said ‘Oh, you must both be very rich men!’ I asked him to write the new word down and he printed ‘NISHIKI-GO!’ and explained it meant coloured carp. That was the very first time I had ever heard the word in my life.

“

Several shouted ‘Takai’ which meant expensive – a word I would use regularly in future years.

”

More beers arrived and we became more relaxed with each one. I asked our new friend where we could eat nearby and if the big hotel had a restaurant. He looked at me as if I was crazy and said ‘Yes, it has a wonderful restaurant but prices are very expensive! It also closes at 10.00pm’ My watch said 8.30 so we had another beer with our new friends and said we would try the hotel restaurant for our meal. Several shouted ‘Takai’ which meant expensive – a word I would use regularly in future years. We finished our drinks, paid for them and left the bar whilst all the regulars waved us both goodbye.

Three minutes later we entered the impressive hotel foyer and walked over to the huge reception desk where three uniformed staff were waiting to assist. I mentioned we needed the restaurant and one of them came out and asked us to follow him. He pointed down a flight of stairs and said ‘Please.’ We went down to enter a huge restaurant, the décor was superb and there must have been fifty tables that were all laid out to perfection but only two couples dining.

We were shown to a table and then served that evening with some of the finest Chinese food I have ever tasted by waiters dressed in immaculate evening dress. Every time our beer glasses were almost empty they were topped up again as if by magic. Roy mentioned to me that, although there were no prices shown, this meal would cost us a tidy sum but it would be worth it just as a very memorable evening.

As we were leaving, the head waiter gave us our bill and asked me to sign my name, he then asked me to pay upstairs. We returned to the front desk and a young lady entered our bill in the cash register, we waited apprehensively as the sums were entered.

The total came to 7,850 yen for us both inclusive of all drinks. That amount, to us, came out as £7.85!

As far as I am aware the price of 7,850 yen is still the same today in 2009 – trouble is, this now means £64.88 purely as a result of the weakness of the English pound!

Whilst we were waiting in the foyer for our taxi to arrive, I noted the hotel room rates of 7,000 yen per night including breakfast, as far as I am aware they are still the same today.

That first trip to Japan ended far too soon for me and I knew, by the time I returned home, I knew that I had fallen hopelessly in love with Nishikigoi and also with the beauty and mystique of Yamakoshi. I accepted the fact I had finally set foot in the place and had walked around parts of it but I also knew I had not really ‘seen’ it!

For me, it still remained a total mystery and I promised myself that I would return as soon as possible but, on that occasion, I would be alone. One day I knew I would try, for as long as it would take, to unravel the ‘secrecy’ the area was enshrouded in and attempt to understand the area and the people who lived there.

As to the Koi purchased on that first visit, less than 40% made it back alive and another 10% managed to recover from the journey. This was due to packing inexperience and the 19 hour flight which was necessary because we could not fly over Russian air space. Instead we had to re-fuel at a 2 hour stop in Anchorage, Alaska.

One year later, my son Tim was born.

I got a divorce from my wife, Jean, in 1978 – I think, and left my home and stayed with Paul and Cath Holgate (mentioned above) until it all blew over.

Whilst all this was going on I was asked by my boss to make a video that would be shown to other HMV shop managers as to how to run a successful HMV store – my brain ran amok with all the thoughts in my mind at the time – so I decided to make a video that turned out to be – “How NOT to run a successful HMV record store”!

It really was a funny video and when it was first shown to a huge audience at the annual EMI conference, it really did go down a storm!

Alas my boss thought otherwise and sacked me on the spot with only two week's wages and holiday entitlements!

I immediately paid a barrister £500.00 to act for me after I had shown him all my achievements at HMV and we decided to take the matter to a tribunal.

This went on for a few months until EMI decided to settle out of court – in the end I settled for £16,500.00 as compensation – this tidy sum helped me set up my business as a Koi dealer!

Before we split up I had a Koi that even Roland Seal could not tell me if it was a Sanke or a Showa and had bought it from the Umemura Company in Osaka in the previous year. In short, this Koi became sick, it had lesions all over its body and had completely lost most of its fins. So, after speaking with several Koi enthusiasts, I decided to follow the majority of advice and put her on a course of Gentamycin injections. Knowing I had to do something with the Koi until after the divorce had been sorted out I knew I had a pond of around 2,200 gallons with no Koi in it but the water was pea green. I carefully placed her in that pond, knowing she would never be fed and no water changes or waste removal would ever be carried out. However, I did not have the heart to euthanise her – even though she was in such a bad condition!

She must have been in that pond alone for some fifteen months before I returned to collect my home and live back in the property once again. By then, I had totally forgotten that I had a Koi in my ‘green water’ pond!

One afternoon I decided to empty the pond by siphon and pump and give it a good clean in readiness for new Koi coming in shortly. The pond was only shallow with 65% of it only being three feet in depth and the remainder sloping down to five feet deep.

As the pond slowly emptied, I detected a flash in the water and suddenly remembered I had left a Koi in the pond. I rushed for a bowl and a Koi net and ran back to the pond and eventually caught her and released her into the bowl.



SHE WAS 'MAGNIFICENT' AND 150% TRUE SHOWA, SHE HAD HEALED PERFECTLY EVERYWHERE – THE BODY AND FINS WERE BEAUTIFUL AND I JUST STOOD THERE LOOKING AT HER IN DISBELIEF. I EVEN TURNED HER OVER IN THE BOWL AND THERE WAS NO TRACE OF ANY DAMAGE WHATSOEVER! I RECKON SHE HAD GROWN FROM 45CMS TO 55CMS DURING THE TIME SHE HAD SPENT IN THE 'MAGIC' POND! AND, WHEN WE FINALLY DRAINED THE POND, WE HAD TO FISH OUT TIM'S RED TRYCICLE OUT OF IT!

The National Show was to be held in Diss, Norfolk some weeks later and I was determined to enter my Showa into the show. We made a very early start – it's a long way from the North West to Diss! We entered our Koi and then went to a local café for breakfast.

At the end of the day, the judges could not decide on one Sanke entered and my Showa and were in a 'tie' position so they decided to flip a coin and the Sanke won. Soon afterwards Roland Seal came over to me and asked me where I had obtained the Koi from. I told him it was the same Koi I bought from Umemura when he did not know if it was a Sanke or a Showa. I still don't really know if Roland believed me or not.

I had bought the Koi from Umemura for £25.00 and sold her to the Glaze family in the Midlands, soon afterwards for £500.00 – and they were well pleased to own the 2nd. Best Koi in the UK

In 1979, after the divorce, I personally decided to become the very first 'Koi Only' dealer outside of Japan.

I then drove down to see Roland Seal and tell him my intentions as well as to ask him for advice. After I had explained my intentions to him he asked me several questions which were:-

'Do you know anyone who would buy one Koi from you for £50,000.00 every year'?

I shook my head and said 'You must be joking'!

He then replied by saying 'That's a pity because, if you did, you could have bought that Koi from a breeder in Japan for £30,000.00 and made £20,000.00 profit for yourself – AND – only have to handle ONE Koi per year, which you could keep in a pond in your garden until your buyer collected it – AND – you would only have to look after one Koi per year!

Roland then asked me question after question, until we finally got down to:- 'Do you think you could sell 200 Koi for £250.00 each per year'? And I replied by saying 'Yes, I think that's possible - with the right advertising'.

Roland replied by saying – 'That is another pity, because you would have to handle 200 Koi, instead of only one, you would need many ponds to build, an advertising budget, some staff and vehicles – plus you would have to find premises to sell them from – in short – OVERHEADS – which are expensive'!

“

The next problem was ordering some Koi – and I was VERY naïve back then because I believed then that Koi were available all year around in Japan.

”

I replied by saying ‘Yes but I also want to sell pumps; books; nets; Koi foods; medications and a host of other accessories PLUS I also want to design and build Koi ponds for clients that need them’. I eventually left Roland, personally feeling slightly depressed, but still determined to carry out my dream of becoming the very first ‘Koi-Only’ dealer outside of Japan.

It was then when the hard work started, I decided to trade from home – even though I knew it was not allowed but I had to start out somewhere. Back then, I had three ponds, two in my garden, one was 1,600 gallons and the other 2,200 gallons plus another in my garage which held 1,200 gallons. I then built another four ponds, two to go on my patio and another two to be housed in a spare back room of my house.

The next problem was ordering some Koi – and I was VERY naïve back then because I believed then that Koi were available all year around in Japan.

On my only visit to Japan we were taken to a dealer in Kyoto named Izokazu Noma who had, to my eyes, some wonderful Koi for sale, and he had given me his business card which was printed in both Kanji and English.

So I contacted him – I cannot remember how, I spoke zero Japanese and he spoke zero English and this all took place in 1979! In the end I placed an order with for large Nishikigoi and transferred my money to his account for advance payment, not really sure if Mr. Noma would actually send my order!

Fortunately, for me, Mr. Noma sent me the large Koi, as I had requested, which exceeded all my expectations, they were superb and only two had died in transit, some others were ‘groggy’ after their flight ordeal but soon recovered in my pond that I had prepared in advance to receive them. It was not so safe shipping Koi in those days via Alaska!

As soon as I had inspected the Koi closely I rang Roland Seal and asked him to reserve me a four page spread in the forthcoming monthly BKKS magazine and then hired a local photographer to come and take pictures of all my new Koi as well as some new filters I had just finished designing from an outside contractor in the plastics business.

I then started to write texts for the advertisement – it would be the very first full colour advertisement that was ever placed into the magazine. Remember I was still trading from home at that time.

When the magazine finally arrived through my letter box I avidly found the centre pages and was amazed with the quality of the advert – it was exactly as I had intended it to be. There were some 20, or so, thumbnail prints in the double centre pages, each one had the variety, sex and price under it. I recall the most expensive one was a lovely Kohaku at £600.00 – a price unheard of in 1979, and I had grave misgivings that it would not sell.

That very same morning, the first telephone call to come in was from someone I did not know at all, he was called Stan White and lived in Birmingham. His first words to me were 'Is the £600.00 Kohaku still for sale?', I replied that it was, then he replied by saying 'Don't sell her, I am coming up to buy her right now' – I could not believe it, this was the very first day of the release of the magazine!

He duly arrived and bought the Koi for £600.00 in cash. I then packed the Koi for transportation and he drove away – I have never seen or heard from him since!

I had MANY telephone inquiries from that advertisement in the following weeks, one was Greg Jackson who owned Harrow Koi in London, Greg drove up to see me and bought three of the Koi in the advertisement. Next to come along was Joe Wilmington and Syd Canavan – both from Liverpool – and in later years we were to become close friends and Joe became a VERY good customer. Ron Sharpe from Nottingham, later to work as 'Koi Manager' for Pedigree Pets also used to come up to me to purchase Koi from my home.

By 1981 I had, on several occasions, complaints from my neighbours that I was running a business from my home, which I tried to brush away. However, I next received an official letter from the local Council Offices that I MUST cease trading from home and gave me six months to find new premises.

Back then, I had a customer named Mike Kershaw who lived in Glossop, Derbyshire and he visited me regularly to buy

Koi. I told him about my predicament and Mike replied by saying 'I suppose you are looking for a site on a garden centre premises?'. I replied by saying 'NO, I do not wish to be like all the other retail outlets who sell tropical's & other coldwater species, instead I need a secure Industrial Unit located near a motorway junction'.

Mike beamed, he then said 'I own an Industrial Estate at Golborne near Warrington, why not come and visit it with me, you can take your pick of any units that are unoccupied'. I had never even heard of Golborne before but Mike told me that it was exactly only one mile away from exit 23 of the M6 motorway.

Two days later, Mike picked me up from home and soon I found myself on the main East Lancashire road heading towards Liverpool, eventually Mike turned right at the second roundabout, drove for some 500 yards and then turned right to enter into 'Millingford Industrial Estate'. The site manager approached Mike to see if he could assist him in any way, Mike said to him that we needed keys to enter the locked buildings to find one unit that would be suitable for keeping Koi – the site manager stared at me blankly, but went back to his office to collect the keys and accompanied us to open up the units!



Mike also told me that we could have the first three years 'Rent Free' on any building we decided to go for! By then, I was getting to be VERY interested. After about an hour of strolling around the site I honed in on one particular building which was a large nissen hut, simply a concrete base with a huge, curved roof fastened to it. There were no walls to support the roof, instead the huge, curved roof was simply attached to the base by huge bolts and tightened up and secured by even larger nuts. I confirmed to Mike, the next day, that I would take the unit and move in right away, Mike said he would contact the site manager to give me the keys to enter and exit the building and the adjoining offices.

At that time I had employed two younger guys to assist me, one was Bill McGurk and his close friend Howard Scott, I am still in touch with them both. Today, Bill and his wife Maureen work for Purdin Koi farm in New Orleans and Howard and his wife Lesley have a VERY successful business as financial advisers. However, back in 1981 we were just three 'Koi Guys' who had to build as many amazing ponds and filters as fast as we could to make our unit as interesting as possible to future customers.

It took the three of us from September 1981 to the beginning of May 1982 plus other outside help such as bricklayers, joiners, painters ('a very young Dave Dyson was one of our painters'), plus other landscapers and gardeners.



Chapter 4

Trust me i'm a koi dealer...

When we opened for business in May 1982 we had five small ponds each holding 2,200 gallons and one main pond holding 8,000 gallons. All these ponds were formed out of two inch box section steel and lined with marine plywood. After that, they were waterproofed by tailor-made butyl liners. Also, all around the 8,000 gallon pond we had glass display cases, with shelves, which allowed us to display all our dry goods. As I recall, on Christmas day 1981, I went into work, as usual, and crawled under ponds fitting four inch bottom drains and also not allowing them to leak water – I was very successful as well – it was a very rewarding Christmas day for me!

All the time we were working hard on the unit, inquisitive Koi keeper's would come in to see if we had anything to sell them, even though we were not yet open for business. At around the same time, I had invented and designed the first four inch bottom drain for Koi ponds.

Just for the record, the guy who is selling 'Spindrifter' drains has simply copied MY sump, and then copied PROKOI'S air diffuser!

Anyway, back in 1981, I had designed the bottom drains which were fabricated for us and delivered for us to sell to the public.

By early May in 1982 the unit looked like a one million dollar outlet – it was immaculate and I was so proud of it. We had beautiful Koi in all the ponds and they were also very healthy. We had also sent out mail shots to EVERY customer who had ever bought ANYTHING from us since 1979 and invited them to attend the first day's events on the very first Saturday we would, at last, open our doors to our own customers. The next day, Sunday, would then be opened to the general public for the first time.



Many Koi keepers came in over that weekend – remember it was May 1982, and ALL weekend we were rushed off our feet trying to serve our customers. To tell you what I took that weekend would be spilling the beans but I will tell you – I took a little over £33,000.00 – so what is that comparing it to today's value? Is it more like £150,000.00?

However, it was not all good news because there were several Koi collectors in the UK back then who 'thought' they had VERY good collections of Koi. However, when they saw MY Koi and the prices I was asking, it then devalued the worth of their own Koi collections as mine were FAR better – and they knew it.

By then, I was spending more time in Japan than at Infiltration, learning the complex ropes and buying more and more Koi.

By the time it turned around from winter 1982 to spring 1983, things had changed significantly, Ian Stewardson had started to visit Infiltration on a regular basis and was buying very high class Nishikigoi. Ian came to visit me at home just a few weeks ago and he remains my longest standing customer as well as being a really good friend and advisor.

At around the same time that Ian started visiting us we had a frightening insurgence of new trade customers to Golborne to purchase both Koi and dry goods, here are a few from my poor memory:-

Bernard Channing – Japanese Water Gardens
 Douglas Brothers
 Dennis and Hilary Wordsworth – Coldstream Koi
 Greg Jackson – Harrow Koi
 John Cowell – Quality Koi

 Ray Talbot – The Real McKoi
 Kent Koi
 Peter Tebby – West of England Aquatics
 Ken & Pauline Smith – Clearwater Koi
 Hatherton Aquatics
 John Woodall – DJ's Koi
 Shotgate Koi
 Tree Circle Ltd. – Barry Morgan



Also, around this time, we had a huge insurgence of retail customers – again, please excuse my poor memory:-

Ian Stewardson
 Mary Riddoch
 Joe Wilmington
 Rachel Gosling
 Peter Chester
 Ian Fishwick
 Tony West
 Sue Finney
 Alan Bradwell
 Tommy Bradshaw
 Joe Guess
 Mrs. Peat
 Mr. Spurling
 John Stevens
 Richard Cardwell
 Richard Jones
 Alan Levington
 Phil Edwards
 John Hall
 John Shelton
 John Fallows
 Colin Physic
 Alan Rogers

John Mercer
 Lance James
 Stan Collinge
 John Cartmel
 Peter Stokes
 Stan Collinge
 Peter Waterman
 John Lilley
 Dr. Pastorski
 Dr. Nadra
 Dr. Sebastian
 Nigel Caddock
 Greg Peck
 Ed Clark
 Trevor Rees
 Barry Cyrel
 John Hurford
 The Duke and Duchess of Worcestershire
 Mac Wilson
 Alan Kellaway
 Sam Martin
 'Man' and Wendy
 Ernie Johnstone

And there are MANY more to add to this list - but I just can't remember them all as of right now!

However, to service and deliver goods and Koi and carry out pond servicing to all these customers we needed more staff and more vehicles! So more staff had to be employed and more vehicles had to be purchased, I quickly realised how correct Roland had been with his assumptions about the dreaded OVERHEADS.

At around that time (1984) we were bringing in several containers a year, from Japan – they were full to the brim with dry goods such as filter matting; filter brushes; stone lanterns; air pumps; Koi nets; ‘Ozonisers; Biotron lamps; ‘Sakura’ Koi foods; medications; airstones etc.

By then, we also had our own range of GRP filters made up for us, to our designs, by Bernard Channing who owns Japanese Water Gardens in Nottingham.

Throughout all of this I was still making many trips to Japan and sometimes spending up to three months at a time there buying many more Koi. The BKKS had then got a membership of some 5,000 Koi keepers up and down the country – they were flying, but not keeping up with the modern times.

I repeatedly begged them to stage a ‘Japanese-Style National Show but refused as they said it would be far too costly. So, in 1985, Bernard Channing and myself, out of sheer frustration, decided to stage our own event named ‘Nishikigoi ‘85’ near Bernards premises in Nottingham.

I ordered proper blue Koi show ponds from Japan and coerced several Japanese breeders to come over and take part in the judging of the show. We also stated that Koi entries would displayed together by variety and size, which the BKKS thought was dangerous as disease could spread. However, the Japanese had used this method for many years and had no problems with it – it all made the judging so much easier. We had identical jumpers made for all the judges that looked very smart and the show was a RESOUNDING success.

More to the point it also made the BKKS sit up and see that times were changing with regards to modern-day Koi shows! The vast numbers of Koi keepers who attended ‘Nishikigoi ‘85’ were far, far more than we could have ever envisaged. The Koi dealers who had stands at the show were delighted with their sales and the show itself also made a substantial profit.

Also, in 1985, I designed and produced my first Vortex Unit which was huge. It measured six feet and three inches tall and fifty four inches in diameter. Many fell about laughing and joking at it and had great doubts as to if it would really work. I would love to know today the total number of Vortex Units that have been sold since – world-wide!

By 1985 we had built a Japanese-style rock pond and waterfall within our unit that customers were fascinated with and then I decided on taking the adjoining unit of 6,500 square feet to build more ponds.

By the time the late 1980's came around, our Koi had just about taken every Supreme Champion award possible. This is a record I am so very proud of, to date (2009) our Koi have taken 17 'Supreme Champions' awards in UK National Shows, no other UK dealer, excluding Yume Koi (who has won twice) has taken more than one of these awards – and many famous UK Koi dealers are still trying to find just a single one! To give examples, none of the dealers listed below have EVER supplied ONE single Supreme Champion to any UK BKKS National Show.

Selective Koi Sales
Shirley Aquatics
Koi Water Barn
Clearwater Koi
Japanese Water Gardens
Richdon Koi
Avenue Fisheries

There are many, many other Koi outlets also, but these are too small to mention. The only other Koi companies I can recall who have actually supplied a Supreme Champion to a National BKKS show, since 1981, are the under mentioned:-

DJ's Koi – ONE
How Kang Koi – ONE
Peter Waterman – ONE
Yume Koi – TWO

It is going to take some very enterprising Koi company to reach my very proud record of 19!

I had one member of staff there, at Infiltration, in the late 1980's named Dennis Mitchell who was, and still is, a close and personal friend of mine. Before he joined Infiltration, Dennis was a motor mechanic and was also a very hard worker. One night, as we were locking up the shop, Dennis came to me and told me that he had been offered a managers job with Peter Waterman who was opening a retail and wholesale Koi outlet in Cheshire and had found a Koi supplier in Japan who would supply him with both Koi and dry goods. I was shocked but wished Dennis well in his new venture – what else could I do?

Peter Waterman's supplier in Japan – who will remain nameless – no it won't, it was Megumi Yoshida who eventually supplied him with shipment, after shipment of Koi together with one of his own staff who came over to the UK to assist Dennis. After Peter Waterman's premises and Koi ponds had been built and completed, his Japanese supplier kept sending him more and more Koi shipments.

Unbeknown to me, when Dennis left my employment he took with him a photocopy of a recent container invoice of dry goods I had recently received from Japan. He then faxed this to Waterman's supplier in Japan who replied by saying 'Mr. Peter is paying at least 25% extra for his dry goods than he should, I can supply you with these same goods much cheaper.'

Now, I knew perfectly, that I was not paying over the odds for my dry goods – only a 10% commission to my supplier in Japan so I started to think. By then, Waterman's supplier had shipped him in two container loads and the prices he had been retailing these goods at had seriously started to destroy my own dry goods business.

Soon afterwards, I learned on the grapevine that Dennis had started buying his Koi for re-sale from Bernard Channing in the UK and had asked his Japanese supplier not to send more Koi but, instead to concentrate on dry goods.

It turned out that the Japanese supplier had been charging Waterman WELL over the odds for his Koi and losing much on the containers – swings and roundabouts!

As soon as Dennis cancelled the Koi, the Japanese supplier cancelled the containers – but it still had damaged the dry goods business badly in the UK!

In a few more years time Peter Waterman closed down his Koi business down as a result of the losses it was making. Dennis then started out on his own.

In September 1990, it was decided to close down Infiltration and re-name it as PETER WADDINGTON LTD – trading as INFILTRATION.

I needed expert assistance, so I rang Dennis and Hilary Wordsworth (Coldstream Koi) in Leeds and asked them if they would like to come on board to join me as partners. They rang me back after two days to say they would, they then made some arrangements to come over and stay in my house until they had sold their house in Leeds and found accommodation nearer to Golborne. The company started out fine – until we felt the effects of a very large recession, Koi are all well and good in the 'good times' but are purely a luxury item in the 'bad times'!

In 1992 Joe Wilmington rang me to say he HAD to sell his collection of Koi as he was in financial difficulties. After a few days of telephone calls I agreed to buy them as they were the finest collection of Koi in the UK back then.

We had just finished building some wonderful indoor, heated ponds inside a large greenhouse, at a farm named 'Lemace Ltd'. near Doncaster and decided to take all Joe's Koi over there to keep them in good condition and carry on growing them – the collection was superb and the Koi simply thrived as a result of ample natural daylight and under floor heating!

Soon afterwards I received a telephone call from a guy in Germany who wanted to know desperately if I had any HIGH QUALITY Nishikigoi for sale I told him we had the best Koi outside of Japan – he replied by saying 'Please book us some hotels for next Friday and Saturday – we will fly over to meet you and see your Koi'.

His name was Christoph Wolters and he and I have been close friends ever since – even today, he still rings me. The German party arrived on the Friday evening and we took them on Saturday to our two ponds at Doncaster.

To say our German friends were impressed, that is a HUGE understatement – they were fighting over the Koi and taking photographs of them, then writing retail prices down in their notebooks. I sold five Koi that afternoon but Christoph promised to ring me in two days time as he had other, elderly Koi keepers over there who were desperate to find and buy high class Nishikigoi. He duly did and within that week we had sold another ten very expensive Koi to Germany!

The German contingent got us well through the UK recession because, not only did they want us to supply them with high class Koi – they also wanted us to design and build ponds for them!

Fortunately Christoph owned a wonderful hotel together with a high class restaurant where we stayed – free of charge! For the rest of 1992 and the most part of 1993 we found ourselves in Germany both working hard and playing hard!

However, October 1993 was a very special event in my 'Koi Life' as I had decided to take my partner Dennis Wordsworth with me to Japan for the very first time AND not to use any Japanese agents at all!

As the time approached flight day, Dennis could not even believe that, at last, he would see Japan for the very first time in his life – a place he had desired to go for many years. It was also a big thrill for me to take Dennis to Japan as I always enjoy explaining the geography and the customs throughout Japan and witness the looks on their faces. I had explained to Dennis on several occasions that I would find out and record all our purchases and would guide to him all of the Koi breeders and that he would be doing the actual driving around the mountainsides in our hire car, so he would require a green card from the AA – Dennis was ecstatic!

Dennis took to driving in and around Yamakoshi like he had done it all his life and enjoyed every second of every day! His eyes were sometimes opened wide at some of the quality Koi we saw and the wonderful conditions they were kept in. Since 1993 to 2004 Dennis accompanied me on every single trip to Japan.

He is now, like me, an old-timer at it – but never underestimate Dennis Wordsworth because, in anything to do with Koi, he is VERY, VERY good. In fact, and I say this rarely about anyone, but Dennis Wordsworth is an expert in ALL aspects of Nishikigoi.

In December 1994, just after our stocks had arrived from the October and November harvests, Ian Stewardson paid me a visit together with another gentleman who was very well dressed. Ian introduced me to him saying that the well dressed gentleman was from Wolverhampton and his name was Bill Oakley. We shook hands and Ian said 'Right, let's go and see your new Koi'. I took them into our building and showed them the pond our very best Koi were housed in and then left them with each other.

As I recall, there were many other customers in the building at that time. Around 30 minutes later, Bill came over to me, shook my hand again – and then he said he would become a very good customer to me. He kept to his word and has been the biggest spender, by far, to my business – and, believe me, I have had many big spenders! Bill has spent far more than any other single enthusiast and far more than any other dealer. Thank you so much Bill, from Dennis and Peter and special thanks to Ian Stewardson for introducing Bill to us.

Anyway, back to the story, in October 1994 I had to return to Japan to buy new stocks, the trouble was, I had no money to even buy the air tickets. Times were hard and the entire Koi business was in total recession!

In late September '94, I received a telephone call from a very good customer of mine whose name was John Mercer and he rang to enquire if I had any Koi food in stock. I replied that I had and he said he would send one of his staff to pick it up. I only knew John by name and did not have a clue about his profession and then said that I would start preparing his order for collection.

His 'staff' turned out to be a fully-clothed Chauffeur who was driving a brand new Mercedes Benz S600! I loaded the Koi food into the immaculate boot and invited him to back in and have some tea which he readily agreed to. We started talking over our tea and soon I mentioned John and said I thought he may be a builder.

The Chauffeur shook his head and then told me that he was M.D. of the Capital Bank in Chester, a sub-division of The Royal Bank of Scotland but John was the main man there and told me that he was incredibly nice to deal with.

After the Chauffeur left I immediately wrote a first-class letter to John asking if he could assist in any way in getting funds to me in Japan. The very next morning John and his Chauffeur arrived, totally unexpectedly, at my shop and John looked very concerned after he shook my hand and sat down – he had obviously read my letter. John said then to me – 'Tell me how I can help you', I almost broke down but bit my tongue instead and said I had no money but needed more Koi to stay alive!

'How much money do you need'? asked John, I replied by shaking my head and said '£100,000 would cover it'. He then replied by saying 'Do you have your Japanese bank account details available now'? I replied in the affirmative and produced all the correct documentation that was necessary. John then said 'It (the money) will be in your Japanese bank account within two days!' I then asked John, 'Do you need a signature onto a written agreement and John replied by saying 'NO, because I KNOW you are an honest man'!

Eventually, I bought tickets to Japan with my credit card for Dennis and I and ventured out into the wilderness of Yamakoshi yet again! When we first arrived, at last, in Nagaoka, the very first thing we did was to hire our car and then drive it immediately to my bank to check if John's transfer had arrived. Thankfully the £100,000.00 had arrived safely to me – totally, without any signatures whatsoever! Dennis and I then had a totally wonderful trip, which made us real profit.

The first thing I did when we arrived back in the UK was to pay back the £100,000.00 to Capital Bank – John did not even charge me one single penny in commission! I faxed him and thanked him for his mammoth assistance officially.

That may seem like it is the end of the matter, but, I assure you, it is only the beginning!

Whilst I had been in Japan, on the last trip, I had been writing serious texts to finish my first book, which was named 'Koi Kichi' (translated as KOI CRAZY). Throughout the winter; spring and and summer of 1995 I stayed at home to finish the book – however I had no money nearly enough to produce it it with.

This meant yet another 'phone call to John, once we had spoken, we arranged a date and a time to meet up in his office, when I nervously took down bromides and texts from my book.

John's secretary, named Hilary, asked me if I needed tea – my hands were shaking very badly and my nerves were on edge when I arrived in saw John's fantastic top floor office for the very first time! Instead, I politely declined the tea and sat down, facing John and his deputy M.D.

After first reading the text and inspecting the bromides he turned to his assistant and said to him – "This talent is what we NEED, we need many more ideas like this.' John then asked me as to how much the production costs would be and I replied by saying 'I have made some checking and the quotes back which I have got indicate some £125,000.00 is around the final figure. John's assistant was sitting close to him when John said quietly to him – 'Open a current account for Peter

and deposit £325,000.00 into it', his assistant nodded. John then said 'I am sorry Peter but I have another appointment in five minutes time – please excuse me'. I shook his hand and loaded all my papers and bromides into my folder when John's assistant told me he would help me carry them and load them into my car. At first I protested saying that I could manage the papers back to the car, but the assistant whispered in my ears and said, very quietly, 'I too, need a cigarette'!

We loaded the paperwork into the back of the Ford Escort Estate and then we both lit up a cigarette, the time was around 11.00am and the weather was dull and very cloudy. I then asked the assistant, who was second in command throughout the entire building of 250 clerical people what EXACTLY John had decided.

He simply replied to me by saying that John Mercer made the rules and could enforce all the rules – in short, he was the boss and could do whatever he wanted to do! For the finer details, he had put a £325,000.00 deposit of funds into my new account to spend on the book – but, if I chose not to spend it on the book I could simply walk away with ALL the money and spend it on whatever I wanted – also, there was not one single piece of paperwork to prove that I owed the money back to them because there were no signatures and no agreements at all!

He also finished by saying that there was only one person in the whole building who could do this, and this was only John Mercer. If anyone else there had been caught with unsigned documents or lack of the official paperwork – they would have been dismissed IMMEDIATELY!

After driving away from the bank, I felt so elated that you would not have believed it. I even drove to the nearest pub, parked up and went inside to enjoy a pint of bitter and a couple of cigarettes!

The first 'proper' book I brought out was 'Koi Kichi' and, to the best of my knowledge was launched at Cascade Water Gardens around the 10th of September 1995.

The book was so successful all around the world – that I could not believe it. I had 10,000 hard-back printed and sold in a lovely slipcase plus 500 only of the leather-bound Limited Editions – the Limited Edition books ALL sold out and were paid for before they were even finished!

The 10,000 standard books sold out after four years so I decided to have another 5,000 'softback' books printed in order to meet demand – these also now have sold out. In short, 'Koi Kichi' was a huge success! It also got me around the world to promote the book – USA; South Africa; Singapore; Philippines; Holland and Germany.

'Koi Kichi' also brought new customers from all over the world who either needed Koi ponds designing and building, coming to Japan with us, or simply needing us to locate high class Koi for them. People such as:-

Roy Pillay in South Africa
Pat Chambers in England
Tom Lansing in Arizona
Thom Blischok in Arizona
Ed Aremia in Belgium
Thom Blischok in Arizona
Bob Winkler in the USA
Dan & Gene in Dallas

Stan Georghiou in South Africa
Peter Smith in England
Stan Georghiou in South Africa
Ross Brawn in England
Alwyn Ellidge in England
Jim Reilly in New Jersey
Heinz Mertens in Germany
Stephen Scott in the Cayman Islands
Kostie Killas in Canada
Dave and Helen Smith in England
Paul Williams in England
Stephen Shell in England
Gareth Parker in England
Chuck and Kimberli Downs in Oklahoma
Michael Kimberling from the USA
Steve Childers in the USA
Steve Gibbins in the UK
Alf Pearson in England
Alan Kellaway in England
John Fallows in England

Sorry – I can't remember them all!

Infiltration closed down in late 2007 after over 28 years of business and as Joni Mitchell said – 'Nothing lasts for long'.



I've spent over seven years in Japan since I first visited in 1977; I can't recall how many return flights I made but there were many and it's simply not possible to list all the experiences there and also back home.

I was in Japan in 2004 when the Chuetsu earthquake struck and that sent alarm bells racing through my mind; I last returned there in 2011 together with some close friends to find there were very little changes made after the near destruction of Yamakoshi-mura.

In 2009 I decided to concentrate on my filter systems and have kept myself very busy producing them and also meeting new Koi friends through these. A special mention here must be given to my friends at Koi Hob in Manila and also to the guys at Yoshikigoi in Poland.

I still have my own Koi pond at home although it's more of a test bed for my filter systems – but I'm still very involved in the Koi hobby and I still am a huge fan of listening to music.

Hence the title – 'Parallel Paths'.



I also have Hilary, my beloved wife, who carefully looks after me on a daily basis. I really hope that this article/book has been useful in explaining where I have come from and how I eventually went on to become an International Nishikigoi dealer known to the Koi informed Koi world as 'Waddy' or 'Mr. Peter'.

In fact, I am such a very lucky person and have had such a wonderful long and happy life being involved with rock music and the fantastic creatures that are now known by all of us as Nishikigoi!

Rock music and Nishikigoi do have some similarities for me and most of us experience ups and downs in our lives – I have no regrets.

Waddy.