

EARLY MEMORIES

I am always filled with wonder when they show documentaries about the sixties on the television. Flower power, Beatlemania, hippies and free love? Well, that's not how I remember it. My parents were poor. They struggled. Dinner for me would often mean beet-root sandwich followed by a few rich tea biscuits. And for them? Well, on "poor" days they had each other and that would have to do.

It isn't that my dad didn't work, he did - he worked hard as a labourer, but in those days, as it is increasingly so nowadays council houses were hard to come by. Only the very lucky could aspire to one of those, and the others had no choice but to pay the private landlord.

The only accommodation my parents could afford was a two up two down slum. It had no proper kitchen, and no bathroom.

There was no light, just a single candle in a glass holder, and the room was in the dark. In an effort to combat the darkness, my mother had put a paraffin lamp by my bed. I would lie there in the dark, weighed down by the heavy grey army blankets that swaddled me tightly into the bed, watching the flickering shadows on the ceiling. I dreaded the moment when my parents went to bed, knowing that my mum would come in and take the lamp away. She had her own fears. Worrying that I would knock the lamp onto the floor and set the house on fire.

The only toilet was outside. In the winter we would all use a potty at night. But, during the summer my mother decided that the smell would be too awful, and so we all had to make the journey outside to the toilet. It was six giant steps from the back door of the outhouse to the toilet. Trembling and often in a cold sweat, I would stretch