

A boy named Howard.

I recently invited Howard to tell us a bit more about himself, as he has lived with KS in such a positive way. He sent me an account of his life which I am publishing in two parts as it is quite long. The first instalment takes us through his childhood and early adolescent years.

Editor

I was born in a nursing home in Barnsley, South Yorkshire and after 10 days came home, to live with my grandma and my parents, as my grandfather had died several years before I was born. Like other children in my age group I was what they called a War Baby, born 4th of January at 4am 1942. Doodle-bugs flew over our property late at night, aimed at the steel works some 6 miles away. Sometimes they fell short and landed on the moors, at other times they flew over our homes and landed on some poor farm nearby killing every one in their beds.

The area of Silkstone Common, where I live, used to be dotted with small mines employing from six to over 400 miners. My grandparents were born and bred in Silkstone. The coal was taken by wooden mine cars carrying a half ton of coal by a haulage system called the 'wagon road.' It was some 6 miles long and driven by a single rope haulage aptly called 'Black Horse' engine house, which was only recently pulled down. The mines opened up close to the haulage system and at the end was the canal basin where coal was taken all over the country, this is hilly country with many woods and fields within its path. Some of the coal was taken down to Buckingham Palace for Queen Victoria

Our village has an interesting history. There is a large memorial in our church yard for some 23 boys and girls who were drowned in a mine in Silkstone Common. The youngest was 5 years old and the oldest was 15 years old, there were about an equal number of boys and girls. They had been told to come out of the pit shaft but being young they attempted to come out via a drift used for ventilation, but on this particular day it had rained very heavily, and the stream outside the surface was like a torrent of water, the drift had air doors and as they opened one then closed it opening the next, a gigantic flood of water cascaded down onto them and they of course were drowned. The result of this tragedy was that a law was passed, that no women and children below the age of sixteen should work below ground in any mine in the U.K.. The nearest mine to my home is now some 27 miles away now, time changes everything.

Our church is called Minster of the Moors, as it used to be the first church you encountered as you came from Lancashire into Yorkshire, and was built in the 11th century with the altar at the southern end and the Tower at the northern end, but in the 15th century it was turned round and it is now correct.

As was traditional, we went to our own village school. It had a big playground and plenty of fields to play football and other games on. There were about 120 girls and boys at the school especially in our age group, as people had bigger families then. I well remember my first day at school. The teacher had an apple which she used to teach us fractions by cutting it into pieces. She wrote on a blackboard with white chalk.

Maths, and later Physics were always my best subjects and most of the people I have met in our group seem to be the same. I was top of the class in maths every year I attended school, whilst English, reading, writing, and history were no good what so ever. Geography was something else I enjoyed, as well as gardening, sports, swimming etc, I hope you get the picture. THICK. !! Yes it made me feel left out. I would have loved to have been able to be good at English and other subjects but for some reason it would just not stick in my mind. Every year I went to school my report was must try harder and concentrate in English. I was good at maths and practical subjects.

We had our own air raid shelter, a concrete building dug down below ground. We used to play in side them (we were only young, five to eleven years old) and it was at this time, aged about eleven, that my first encounter with Klinefelter Syndrome broke to the surface. My body shot up with my legs pushing me ever higher.

It was decided that I attend the Children's Hospital in Sheffield each week for some thirteen weeks. Well they prodded me, pinched me, measured me, and I can well remember a group of about a dozen young and senior Doctors peering at me as though I had come from outer space. They decided I was too thin and needed building up, so I was put on cod liver oil and malt, and was given extra rations (yes we were on rations in those days). I had two ounces of bacon, two of butter, extra bread, extra milk and all the things that help you grow. So that was when it appeared something was amiss, but nobody knew what it was, so I continued like everyone else with my life.

My life carried on with bitter resentment in my mind as to why I could not do as well as other boys and girls in

my class at a lot of subjects, but was very good at a few, and why had my legs grown so much as well. The only draw back with going swimming I found out was the other boys had testicles and penises of a larger proportion than me, so I kept myself away from the others at changing time and went in my trunks to school. Swimming was great, it was the bit before and the bit after that was difficult.

When we were eleven years old we could take our eleven plus. To pass would mean a better education and better future. It was the top 12 in the class who could take it and I was twelfth (maths brought my numbers up). I took the examination at a school in Barnsley. Yes you got it, I failed. I passed in maths and another subject but failed hopelessly in English.

I then went to a Secondary school in Silkstone, which had an intake from all the surrounding villages. There were had four classes with 45 in each class. My parents had both passed to the grammar school so I was the only member of the family who had gone there, but I can honestly say it was the best school I could have gone to. The head teacher lived next to the school, and apart from all our general subjects, we had a poultry farm of about a dozen hens and a cockerel. At the end of the year the boys killed the young hens and cockerels and plucked them, whilst the girls had clean their insides out and dress them.. We sold them on to parents. The rest of the year we gathered about 10 eggs per day and of course sold these as well. It was interesting watching the new hens coming out of their shells as day old chicks and feeling their smooth down coat.

We also went youth hostelling to the isle of Skye with our school. Twelve boys and twelve girls went for ten days. The girls room was under ours and we made a rope ladder which allowed us to get from our room to theirs and back at night. Nobody knew. The teachers went for a pint, so we were well away. We also went swimming at night in the sea which made the games teacher come in too. He was not amused, as it was late May and the sea was cold. *That holiday did more for me than anything I have been involved in, since it brought me out, and made me see there were places to visit and ways to do it, without having to talk to a lot of people about complicated subjects.* Every body was treated the same. You had a duty to do every day from washing to gardening, mucking the pigs out and a variety of things. One of those girls is still a good friend of mine and every other Thursday I visit her home and we have a good chin wag. Many of us still live in the same villages we were born in.

I had also begun working in my spare time, delivering newspapers, and working on farms, ploughing with a big shire Horse called Ben, helping clean up after the cows had been hand milked. The pig sty was the worst place to clean as they left it until it was a foot deep. I also cut turnips up with a manual slicer for cattle food and fed baby lambs. After mum died, these were my ways of raising capital to enjoy cycling and other things I wanted to do.

School wise I tried as hard as I could but to no avail. It made you feel like banging your head against a wall and sometimes I have done that in sheer frustration. I was unable to do better, - cricket, football (goal keeper) rounders, high jump, long jump, the box, yes I could do anything on that, it was just my height. I was the tallest in the class by some way, 6 feet 2 inches at 13 years of age, but then I stopped growing for some reason. I never visited doctor, only the dentist. One thing about being tall is that you can get your own way. I often did. We had a cock of the class. He was the best fighter and I came second, so no one argued with me. If they did, I would send the boot in and a fist in the face. I also let the fire extinguisher off, left all the taps running in the changing room and locked all the doors so it flooded. We had the cane on quite a lot of occasions, but we were lads at school and you only go once, or so I thought.

I left school at Christmas. I was fourteen and my birthday was in the holidays so I started work the day the others went back. It was at a small engineering works where my cousin was foreman fitter. I learnt how to work a lathe. It was a large one as they repaired railway wagons where the wheels and shaft are all one. It meant lifting them up with a jig T bar and placing them between two 7ft diameter face plates to which they were held by a 3 inch pin to drive the wheels round. I would set one going, cutting a reasonable amount off and then set the other wheel cutting the same off by use of calliper gauges about 4 feet across for measuring the diameter of the wheel. Whilst they were cutting I would lift another one into the second lathe and go back to the first one, put a new cut on then back to the other and put a cut on that one, so I used two lathes and 4 cutting heads at the same time. They had to be correct. No-one checked my work before they went back to the wagon they came off. The wage 2pounds, 15shillings and 6 pence. After stoppages that left £1-25 pence each for father and me.

My mum, my best friend, died when I was 14 and a half, I had a younger brother David. He was nine at the time, so to make matters easier I had to make my own

way in life by paying board and buying my own pleasure clothes, and other things I wanted out of my own money. I started my own window cleaning company and cleaned windows at a six pence per window. I borrowed the next door neighbours ladder (he was the village joiner and undertaker) plus a wash leather bucket and duster. As time went by it grew to a full time Saturday job, so one of my mates went into partnership with me. We cleaned the Telephone box for the GPO and the bus shelter for the local company.

My mum had been a concert pianist. As I could not spread the keys an octave I decided I liked the piano accordion and learnt to play that. I would lug it on the train to Barnsley each week and back again to take my music lessons. It was full size 120 base and very heavy. I had to read music, as well as control the bellows. It's not an easy instrument to learn, but I passed several examinations. I joined the accordion club in Barnsley and played in the accordion band.

I also joined the Youth Hostel Association in Barnsley. It was the best thing I did. I liked cycling and we would all make our own way to a Youth hostel, meet to have a weekend walking together, then ride home as a group.. I have known it be eleven o'clock at Sunday night when we have got back from a weekend at Scarborough, Whitby, Robin Hoods Bay or The Lake District. We had countless trips into Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The advantage of having long legs finally came to the fore, and with strong muscles I could ride the wheels off my cycle, I bought a new one when I was sixteen. I put £1 down and then made weekly payments. No - father never bought me anything. If I wanted anything badly enough I would work for it. Money was tight in those days.

When I was fifteen and a half, with my father's help I acquired an apprenticeship with the then NCB (National Coal Board). It was an indentured one that took five years to complete. In order to be a fitter you had to take exams as well. My friends had told me maths and physics were the main subjects. This was it!! I and another 119 went for the interview but a word here and there had been said and a post was made for me.

Howard