

Growing up in Leigh Park

By

Uno Annalon



View of the Lake from the Terrace

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About the Author

Uno Annalon (Philip M Tricker) grew up in West Leigh, Havant, he comes from an ordinary family 'albeit large'. In many ways he was a dreamer and a loner to a point. A keen guitarist he would go on to play in many bands and perform many gigs in 2000 his band headlined and played to 15000 people at the open-air concert on the I.o.W. His schooling was all in Havant except when he studied to be a teacher at Oxford TEFL. He is a member of the Teachers' College, Oxford. In 2000 he recorded CD albums with his band and then as a solo artist. Never wanting 'fame' he never pushed for the heights. He has lived in Hungary and now in Poland where he has continued to teach and to record.



Credits

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Introduction

For those of you who don't know or have never heard of 'Leigh Park' let me tell you. Leigh Park is a housing estate on the outside of Havant in Hampshire. It was once the biggest estate in Europe. The estate is split into two parts 'West Leigh' and 'Leigh Park' it is a huge place with schools, shops, woodland, and parks etc. The community was one big family back in the 60s, 70s, and 80s before it started to change. (Not for the better).

My name is Uno, back in the Leigh Park days it was 'Phil Tricker' back in the early 60s my family moved from Portsmouth to West Leigh. Growing up in Havant was like living in a magic book, a story, a dream. Because really it was the magic of Leigh Park Gardens the woods next to my school and those secret places we found as kids. And the great shops but above all the people, it was them their sense of community that made life on the Park what it was and why now after so long away I find myself writing about it, this is my story about those I loved, grew up with and miss. This is an account of my life growing up on the Park. I write it now as I think I am old enough now to understand what it was all about. The people the places the feeling

that this was the most amazing way to grow up in what was the most amazing place with the best people. Many are now sadly gone so many died too young, but they were there at the time and they are still in my heart I can still see their faces in my mind's eye. I owe it to them and you to let everybody read what we had in the Park. I don't believe there was any other place on earth like it. Or maybe that's the romantic in me!

It's July 2014, I am standing on the top of the arches in Leigh Park Gardens 56 years old, looking down to the lake, to say the memories came flooding back is an understatement. The sun was out the greens looked as they always did back in 1975 the trees till say 'hello' I can admit tears rolling down my face 'I was home' it was then that I really knew the magic of Havant and Leigh Park and West Leigh.

As I stood there looking all the names and face's came back, oh how I loved you all, how you made my life feel worth living. There were times I didn't think I would make it but so many of you were there. We were all there for each other.

So let me share my growing up with you

I was 15 when my dear father had died and I was lost, I loved my dad didn't really care for my mother at all but my dad was everything. I came from a large family and at that time it was good to have them around, however later as a family we fell apart and to this day I only speak to two members. So here I am 15 years old; I go to Wakefords School just around the corner. My teacher was Mr John Porter a great man and friend as many teachers were in those days. Anyway more about people as we go. So I am 15 lets go.....

Hard times

It's fair to say no one had much money and in Oakshott drive it was the same. Many are the times that someone would knock the door and ask for some sugar or even bread, eggs, milk, etc. we used to laugh at those with a nice car dad always said they only eat beans on toast as they must pay the credit. Every Saturday there would be a 'jumble sale' at the local school and I remember mums queuing up to get in. Once inside the clothes were all on tables and mums would be pushing each other to get the best things. There were shoes and all manner of

things cloths, toys, and etc. Most of the families took credit for furniture and rented their TV from Rumbelows or Currys we used to call credit 'on the tick or on the knock' one family had four sons and they would take it in turn to wear the shoes. We would go walking past farm fields and take vegetables from the field and apples off the trees even eggs from the farm chickens if we could. Winter was hard for many families no central heating in those days. We would have a coal fire and burn wood and logs or anything if we were really hard up. I can remember my dad out in the back chopping wood or boxes. We had an open fire in the front room and in the big bedroom. It got bloody cold at night we would put dads overcoat on the bed to keep warm. Winters were cold walking to school the wind would cut through you and in those days we had deep snow as I remember, and not many of us had a top coat we wrapped up as best we could from the biting cold and rain. The good news was that for me my school was only a few hundred yards away.

George the milkman (sadly gone now)

We had our characters some I will name. One of them was George the milkman. A friendly man, always on time with the milk, food stuff like

potatoes and yogurts and tinned foods. I can remember mum not having any sugar so we would have to run to the next street to catch him and get some. Sometimes he would bring his son 'Willy' with him and even let you ride on his milk float, he always had a smile and kind word, like I said no one was rich and I guess we were all in the same boat. Then there was Tony Tupper he had been in the army and was friends with my family and brothers, he would come home and tell stories about what he had done and places he had been. Still friend 43 years later; once he took me rabbit hunting in his car to Hayling Island. We didn't catch any! But was great to get out for the night and listen to Toni's stories.

The Park was full of such people. We had shops like the Co-op and a newsagents and 'mace' food shop as well as Mr Selwoods grocers. All in Oakshott Drive. Mr Ralph Cousins and Glenda Horler had the newsagents shop. Every one new every one you couldn't escape. The strange thing was that people from outside the Park thought it was a rough old place full of crocks and drugs, ok it wasn't perfect but it was nothing like people like to say it was.

The Co-op was great because many people used it and at the end of the year there was the 'divvy'; this was your reward for being a good customer, depending how much you had spent in the year you would get cash back. Many people relied on this for Christmas and such. And I remember my dad rubbing his hands together saying 'divvy day is here' I can remember going to Portsmouth to the Co-op office to get the 'divvy' there were long queues waiting, it was exciting to see the looks on people's faces as they came out of the office with their 'divvy'

The Puffing Billy to Hayling Island

We all got up on Saturday morning early dad and mum was taking us to Hayling Island to the beach. So not only were we going out for the day but it will be by bus to Havant and the train to the beach – what an adventure! I used to watch the puffing billy from my classroom in Sharps Copse School the smoke puffing out as it went along the tracks to Havant, and now we are going on it, this will be my first and last time as the line closed. So mum washing my face, towels packed sun cream for me (cause I am ginger – burn like a bloody crisp) and off we went

standing at the bus stop opposite our house. Mates playing in the street come over and ask 'where you going?' you lucky sod. Bus coming dad takes out money kids go free. We got to Havant and walked the few yards to the station and in came the puffing billy white smoke pouring out. The excitement was 'wow' we all got on and dad said I can look out the window what a joy. Not a long ride to Hayling but to be on this fine old man of a train was a dream come true. When we got to Hayling we went to the beach, mum painted me white with sun cream I looked like a ghost. But mum remembered when I was a baby and she didn't put nothing on me and I was really ill. Making up for it now! So now I am in the sea slashing about like a demented chicken (I can't swim) and I see dad coming back with fish-n-chips (life can't get better than this surely).

Bonfire night in Oakshott Drive

The 5th of November was always a great time, the entire street pulled together to make it special for the kids. Dads would collect dead trees and wood to build the fire and mums would

make toffee apples and cake, everyone chipped in for fireworks, it really was a great night. I remember so many names and faces. They were all there one big family. The kids with their sparklers, mums chatting, dads keeping the fire going. Before the fire we would make a 'guy' and stand outside the shops 'penny for the guy' it has to be said it was safe for kids to do and mums didn't need to worry. At the end of the night we kids went home to bed to dream of bonfire night and what we would tell our class mates on Monday at school.

Saturday is shopping day

Saturday mornings we were all up and dressed and off to 'Park Parade' the shopping centre. We had two, Havant or the Parade, most went to Park Parade. There you could buy everything you needed. What I loved was seeing the women with prams and pushchairs babies in arms. And all chatting dads chatting, Great shops dad would go to look at a new TV mum would be in Woolworths and Key Markets and us kids would be sent off to the community centre to watch films and cartoons the 'Saturday pictures' a few sweets and then watch films. It was great. There wasn't one child who didn't enjoy Saturday

pictures .I can still hear us all shouting ‘we want films we want films.....’

After the pictures we would walk home across the swing park over the main road. And have dinner, normally eggs and chip as it was Saturday and then off out to the woods bird nesting or just playing hide and seek. Without a care in the world no fear of being killed or kidnapped we were safe everyone looked out for each other.

All the fun of the fair

In the summer there was ‘Burnet’s travelling fair’ it would come to West Leigh and set up at the bottom of Forest Side Avenue in the field. It was always exciting to go on the rides and they played loud music. We were still using old money in those days; I say that because I was at the fair playing on the penny machines and won about 28 pennies all in my top pocket. Heavy or what? Anyway the fair was there and my sister and her friends would be there hanging out till late. One of their friends gave me a drag on his fag and I was so dizzy. We had all the rides as always none of this ‘health and safety’ rubbish.

Everything was so simple life seemed simple none of us wanted much just a few laughs and full tummy. I used to help the candyfloss man his name was Pete Burnet he would give me two bob if I clean the machine and a toffee apple so if the fair was there all week I was laughing. Sunday was not the best day as we had to go to Sunday school. This meant praying and singing hymns, we had to go, I don't know why but we did. A car would come and take us and drop us home again. Weekends were great apart from Sunday school. We were always outside doing something either playing ball or in the fields or woods. I don't think I knew any kid who stayed in.

Christmas on the Park

After the great excitement of bonfire night the next big thing was Christmas. Again it's important to say that people didn't have a lot of money. We would get presents and fruits and a selection box and clothes. A very exciting time my mum and dad would wake up at 7 on Christmas morning to start cooking the turkey and making the veg. Christmas dinner was

always huge. Presents were more about what you needed than what you wanted. But saying that Christmas was great, everyone was happy. My dad used to make up a box with Christmas things in it and I would have to take it to his friend's house they didn't have much so my dad gave what he could to make their Christmas a bit better, you see people cared about each other. We always watched the Queen on Christmas day at 3.00 and we were silent. Then the Christmas film 'The Last of the Mohicans' TV was about family as well at that time of year. Another great thing that happened a few days before Christmas the RAF from the local air base would fly over Park Parade and play Christmas songs from the planes hanger doors and at the same time Santa Claus would ride on the back of a decorated truck throwing sweets to the children in the street. Looking back now it was truly wonderful that so many did so much for Leigh Park and its people.

The Neighbours

It didn't matter what time of day it was doors were never locked and the back door was where your friends came in. I can still remember mums friends knocking on the door shouting 'ko-we' in they would walk mum would say 'oh just in time for a cup a tea'. They would chat and gossip about the local news and scandal over a cup of PG tips. Kids at school, dads at work, and the washing done, chat time. The house was never empty and the sound of happy laughter was never far away. There was Ann Clifford and Peggy Manship, Mrs Perry the Avon lady and countless others all with something to talk about. The spirit of the community was kept alive by such women. People would lend and borrow from each other everything from soap to sugar even a suit or dress if there was a special occasion, people always sharing what they had. Back then they really did share the good times and the bad times.

Knock knock at the door (are we in or out?)

As I have said people didn't have much money so most of us had to buy things like shoes and clothes on the 'never-never' once a week the man from Corbin's shoes or Johnsons or even the Provident man would knock your door for his two shillings but for many dad had not been paid or wasn't home yet so we hid and pretended not to be in. I am sure to this day that these people knew but also knew we would pay but today maybe not. It was much the same with the rent only a bit more of a problem, in those days we all paid rent and the rent office in Park Parade many didn't go in and missed the payment, some didn't pay and faced eviction they were hard times but again people made the most and got through it all.

Kids never got bored

Today's kids are worlds away from those of us in the 60s, 70s, and 80s there were no mobile phones or x-boxes, it's easy to say 'times change' and they do but not always for the best.

We made our own fun we would play football or hop-sotch, but for me and my friends it was the open fields and ponds and lakes the woods and bird nesting. Come the weekend we were never indoors. We got dirty muddy wet and didn't even get ill. We picked apples from the trees and plums and were never sick. We would stay out until the street lights came on then back home.

Sometimes we went to Langstone Mill and dug for cockles to sell to the fish shop or take home to cook and eat. We used to walk for miles without thinking about. Kids today would die!

We would go catching newts and stickle backs and lizards. Look for moorhens eggs, we were kids and free and loved life. Unlike today's kids who need an update in gadgets and clothes every week above all we were never a problem for our parents and we had and were taught to respect adults.

Let's go to Havant

Havant was a great little town it had an 'arcade' that was magic, shops on both sides little shops and a shoe repair shop called 'the heel bar' you could buy some great things in the arcade and was always good to walk through it and look. There was the 'Southdown bus station' you could get buses everywhere and there was Havant railway station with trains to Portsmouth and London and anywhere you wanted to go. And for 2d. you could buy a bus ticket to Hayling Island and the beach. So there were many good reasons to visit Havant not least for the shops but also the park. Oh nothing better than fish-n-chips in the park from the Mermaid fish-n-chip shop. We had it all on our doorstep. We often went to Havant Park with mum and dad as I said life was simple we didn't want much but we were happy very happy. I used to go to the Sound of Music a music shop in town to buy guitar strings for my little guitar. I would be lying if I said I didn't want for nothing, of course I wanted things but I knew they were

out of reach for the time being. We accepted that you can't always have what you want.

Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday or Palm Sunday was nice the local church would get a donkey and local kids would dress up as Mary and Joseph with other kids holding palm leaves and the sea cadets marching behind, and behind them the faithful. They would walk all round West Leigh and then back to the church.

Anyone got a 'White Elephant'?

The school fête, how could I write a book and not mention the school fêtes? They were always held on a Saturday afternoon at 2.00 and would be planned weeks if not months ahead. All the usual stalls were there and again parents would all help out as well. Mr Craven was the sound man he would bring his speakers and cables and set up the sound and microphone. There would be dance displays, mums and dad races, tombola stall, cake stand and the raffle where you could win anything from wine to meat, oh and let's not forget fancy dress and coconut shy. The local band would play and really it was a great thing

and again all this brought the community together and it was great fun. Even the police were nice. So much to do and all of it free and fun.

There is a magic garden

Some people have to travel miles to walk in beautiful woodlands and gardens, not to mention a wonderful lake with ducks and swans. But we had it all on our door step. How could anyone not love this place? I for one spent more time in the gardens than I care to remember, along with many friends.

People spent whole days in the gardens because it was so big and beautiful. Most would have a picnic in the lakeside and after mums and dads had 'had a nap' then the family would go over the road to the other side. In those days there were many 'groundsmen' like Joe he was a great guy friendly his father in law was Len (I may be wrong) Joe's wife Carol had a little hut selling tea and ice creams. The grounds were kept really tidy and the lake was clean. Years later all the changed and the gardens were neglected for

some time. As sad as it was the one place you could picnic and relax.



The beautiful Leigh Park Gardens viewed from the bottom of the lake



The Upper Lake



One of the many magic paths leading to beautiful fields and glades

Leigh Park Gardens

My mum and dad used to take us there for an ice-cream and picnic. There is a picture of me somewhere in my push chair with dad in 1960.

Countless families and others have been enjoying the gardens for years. I know many of you reading this will have fond memories of a childhood spent walking around the lake past the old boat house, (no longer there), walking on the many paths my dad would point out deer and rabbits and birds like pheasants and all kinds. Always so exciting to be in this place and on the other side we had the farm trail. I do call it a magic place because in the middle of what was the biggest housing estate in Europe was this amazing garden. How we played under the arches and rolling down the hill, hiding in the bushes or the old air-raid shelter. Then walking back up the hill and feeling so tired. What about hitting the tree at the top on the path on the way in?

I wonder where I can buy one fag?

*Oh how many of you know the answer?
Yes...what we did was cut through the fence at
school (Wakefords) and walk down the hill
towards Rowlands Castle to the shop of Bill's
shop that he ran with his daughter Carol. There
you could buy one fag. He would open a packet
just for the school kids (he'd be in trouble if he
did that now) but again it was all a part of the
times no one got hurt it just was! His shop was a
part of us apart of the growing up we all did
from the Park. Along with bottles of cider or
cheap wine we drank in the bus shelter. But we
didn't hurt anyone only ourselves when our
mums and dads found out. Bill and Carol are
long gone now as is so much of what we knew
and loved.*

Anyone care to dance?

*Then there were the after school discos and I
have to admit I went as well. I think the teachers
name was Mr Barber, he had a girlfriend that
we all wanted to dance with. We used to request
the song 'Without You' nice and slow. I danced*

with her, oh my God 15 and in love with my teacher's woman. How un-cool was that? But she was beautiful straight out of a 'James Bond film' oh I can dream.... forgot all about her the next day me and me mate went bird nesting in Wakefords Copse.

Excuse me Mr Rutter have you got any jobs?

Little Leigh farm was just up the road, two of my friends worked there after school and weekends. Graham Philips said I should go with him to see the farmer and ask him. So after school one Friday we went to see him. He asked me if I had ever worked on a farm before. My reply killed everyone...I answered yes I can milk a horse and ride a cow. I got the job but soon wished I hadn't, cleaning out the cow shed was ok but baling hay was a killer, somehow we had fun, can't remember it but they tell me we did. But it was great being a part of the farm and watching the cows and playing in the haystack for hours. And we got money I think £2 each for after school and weekends not so bad.

My first girl friend at 15



Me at 15 at Leigh Park Gardens

Ok so me and my mates used to hang out with some friends from Oak Park (hissssssssssssss) and there was a girl whose sister went to Wakefords (the best) called Carol Payne she was absolutely beautiful I was in love with her so much. Anyway one day they guys said Carol wants to know if you will go out with her. I couldn't believe it me – ugly git Phil... but it was really true and so I said yes wowowow and that

was it, in love we lasted almost a month (and they said it wouldn't last) the problem was I was too young, oh, and I loved my guitar more.

But it was the start of a huge self-confidence this, I stopped thinking I was not good looking or attractive (did I just lie?) after that huge love affair I went back to being hippy Phil.

The Family

I want to just mention here about families in both West Leigh and Leigh Park. Many people have the opinion that most families were dysfunctional because we come from this place. This as all who know us will know is crap. Families fall apart no matter where they come from. But I will say here and now in print coming from the Park was the best growing up I could ever have wanted the people were the very best. And just to add in case there are those who still think badly of the Park. Many huge famous rock singers and musicians came from the Park. It is sad that as we grow we change and that close family we loved and needed is no more. But that is life where ever you come from.

Is that 'Twiggy'

Then came the 'stars', Twiggy was starring in the film 'The Boyfriend' and it was being filmed in Leigh Park Gardens, the dance was filmed by the Lake and some other parts by the Shepherd Keep (picture on next page); but why in my book? Because we went to Wakefords School next to the gardens and we jumped the fence and went down to see the stars and watch the filming. Great time I had and my friends couldn't believe 'Twiggy' in LPG – wow.

Not that it was the only film made on the Park, they also made 'Garry's Gang. And I myself was in two BBC films, they were called 'How Good a Parent' and 'Silver in the City'. And also 'Tommy' was made on Hayling and Portsmouth. So as you can see good old Havant was well liked and wanted by not just us.



The Beacon

I need a new bike dad!

My birthday was coming up so I asked my dad if I can have a bike. Well there was only one place to go, Mr Browns of Billy Lawn Avenue. Bill Brown as he was known use to make bikes and repair and sell them. I don't think anyone knew where his large collection of bikes came from and no one asked. But whatever you wanted Bill was sure to have it. So dad and I went to visit him and look around his bike. We found a nice 'blue three speed' don't remember how much it was but dad bought it and I had it. Two days later I was knocked off my bike in Havant and my dad decided me and bike was not a clever move. But after a week dad let me ride again.

Life on the Park

No matter which way you looked there was always something going on. For the most part West Leigh and Leigh Park were very peaceful and believe it or not it was safe to walk home at any hour alone. I would leave a friend's house at three in the morning and walk home mostly without seeing anyone. There was 'like anywhere' the odd fight in the pub or somewhere

but nothing to worry about. In those days people were too busy with kids and work etc. I can't remember life being 'fast' as I recall it was pretty slow, mums doing the day to day jobs about the house, hanging the washing out, cleaning, making beds. Dads out at work all day until 5.00 then home by bike or bus or just on foot. Summer holidays were mostly in England, Butlins holiday camps or at Bognor Regis in a caravan. I didn't anyone who went to Spain etc, like I said in the beginning no one had money at least not to blow on holidays abroad. In fact I have to say when ever people talked about going abroad the replies were always 'oh no wouldn't like the food' we can laugh at it now as most of us indeed go abroad and love it. I guess there was little spirit of adventure back then or just a cover story for the fact none of us had the money. But come on, Butlins and Bognor were ok. The nearest I got to going abroad was the IoW, for those outside the EU reading this it's the Isle of Wight. I remember the big family holiday was to 'High Fields Holiday Park' Clacton-on-Sea. We saw the 'Black Abbots' and dad took us to see the 'Dick Emery' show; now that was a treat. I could not spell 'theatre' let alone go in one. A whole week having fun miles away from home....till I found out that's where

my mum and dad came from, But still a great time.

Changes we see, or it's all downhill now

Over the years in West Leigh and Leigh Park we have seen many changes; not many for the best either. The beautiful Havant arcade replaced with an almost empty centre I saw. At the old bus stops off the station we had some nice shops, now almost a ghost town. The fields where the fair used to come where we had so many great times, now a football pitch and factory. Park Parade dying and full of nothing, once the 'hub' of the community now little more than a café. The pubs of Havant, some over a hundred years old or more. The Black Dog, the White Hart, The Wheelwright's Arms, the Dolphin, and the Star. So many either closed or turned into something crap. It's true to say that the heart has been torn out of Havant and Leigh Park/West Leigh. And sadly it will never be replaced. Whoever it is that decided to kill Havant should be strung up because they had no idea what they were doing. We were sold out, craped on, ignored. The communities of our town and estate took years to evolve, the trust

and spirit that was destroyed. We have seen it all we have watched it all fade into a memory. Now it is truly something we can only tell our kids because there is little left to show.

*The last time I came to my old street (Oakshott Drive) i wanted to show my friend who came to UK with me my old house, as I pointed it to her four guys came out and we came close to a fight. Standing in Leigh Park Gardens was perhaps the saddest for me, because I spent more time here than anywhere and it was all playing back in my head like a film like it was yesterday, when my friend asked 'are you ok?' I just said 'it's good to be home' my fear now is that one day the will start building on Leigh Park Gardens and market them as **'luxury homes in their own parklands private estate'** because it's all about money, I remember my dad saying years ago when we used to walk as a family in Rowlands Castle, 'take a good look son because it won't be here much longer' How right he was! Gone are the milk floats and bakers' vans. I used to help a baker called Derrick Smith who worked for 'Smith and Vosper' all these people who came to your door with milk, bread, then the 'chip man',*

Fridays will never be the same. Coroner drinks man and van. Toffee-apple man on his three wheeled bike. The knife sharpener man, the rag and bone man, the good old door to door salesman, the HP man coming for payment each week. The mobile grocer, so many characters all gone, Remember when the grocer wrapped your potatoes and vegetables in paper and you could buy two or more eggs. Remember when meat was real not this processed rubbish that's killing us all. A huge part of our everyday lives now just memories. Reality has gone, health and safety took over and money means more than community. My life growing up in Havant, Leigh Park and West Leigh was the best I loved all the people that made it the incredible place it was. It's no exaggeration to say that Havant and the Park and West Leigh had it all we had the sea the towns the countryside the lot. The reputation that we had for crime and violence was over exaggerated and from people who knew nothing about Havant. In fact you could say that for an estate so big it is a wonder that the crime rate etc. was so low. Anyway that is my story, thank

you to everyone who played a part in my life back then and now, those of us who made are now remembering it like me in Facebook pages and chats to each other. We are doing what our parents said we would do, and our kids will no doubt hand down a version themselves. Before you close the book please take a few moments to remember those we knew who sadly didn't make it. Like the beautiful few I have named below.

I wish you all a long and happy life.

Love and light

Uno

*To see clips of Leigh Park Gardens in the film;
Google: 'Dream Sequences from Ken Russell's
The Boyfriend'*

In memory of:

Paul Knight

Pete Gould

Susan Lock

Renate Millard

Donald Craven

Mary Fenton

Annette Rawlings

Phil Hardy

Chris Peskett

Michael Hammond

Katherine Shackleton

Phil Redfern

*And all those beautiful young people who so
sadly left us too soon. You are missed by us all.*

Unc Annalon



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