

The Lost Jumper

“You’ve lost it?” It was my mum.

“Well, where did you have it last? Have you looked in your bag?”

It was Tuesday morning and we were standing in the kitchen. Mum wasn’t angry, just exasperated. She had her coat on and was ready to go. It was a shopping trip down to Firth Park and whilst I don’t think we particularly enjoyed the shopping (what ten year old does?) I don’t think we ever really complained. It was just what we did sometimes in the school holidays. And anyway, we did occasionally get a chance to go to the toyshop and buy an Airfix model or a Corgi car. I couldn’t see that happening this time. I’d lost my jumper.

“Go and look for it.”

I looked everywhere. Where on earth did I have it last?

“Oh, come on, you can look when we get back.”

An hour and a half later and I’m standing in the conservatory. Well, I say conservatory, but it wasn’t what the kind of conservatory you’d think of now – more sort of a ramshackle area built onto the back of the garage that you entered through the kitchen. My dad had built it himself in his own inimitable fashion out of wood, glass, corrugated metal and quite probably masking tape. There was stuff everywhere! There always was. There was an old chest of drawers filled so full of tools that the bottom two drawers wouldn’t close properly. Dad always had more files and rasps than anyone I ever knew. There were bits of old carpet on the floor, stools, fold-away chairs for camping, bottles by the doorstep and jars of chemicals on a high shelf. Dad was the only person I ever knew who had a stoppered glass jar with a chemical in that could get chewing gum off your trousers. There were tea-towels, bits of wood, and dustpans and brushes. There was even a washing line along which I once tried to climb, only to fall off, straight onto my back on the concrete floor. In fact, there was everything except my jumper.

It was just as I was making my way upstairs to have another look in our bedroom that I remembered. The park: Firth Park, not Longley Park or Concord Park, but Firth Park. Sometimes, not often, but sometimes in the holidays we spent the day at Mark and Andrew’s: the Sinclairs. I used to love going to Mark and Andrew’s. They lived on Bellhouse Road near church, so we could have walked but usually mum would drop us off in the car. We’d been friends for as long as I could remember because their mum and dad were best friends with ours. We didn’t see them all the time but we saw them on a Sunday at Sunday School and once a week at Boys’ Brigade and we nearly always went on holiday with them. They were campers and caravanners too.

But the time I loved best was when we went to their house.

They had a green carpet that seemed to have a deeper pile than ours. Their television always seemed bigger than ours. The walls in their house always seemed thicker and more solid than ours. Their settee always seemed more comfortable than ours and for some reason, when the sun shone through the bay window in their front room, it always seemed to shine more brightly than at our house. And why, oh, why, did beans on toast at their house always taste better than at ours?

And we’d been to their house yesterday.

Shortly after we'd been dropped off, we all decided to go and play football in the park. We usually went to Concord Park from their house because it was just down the road, but for some reason that day, we'd decided on Firth Park. It was much further away and I suppose we'd been feeling adventurous. The sky was a bit grey and overcast, but that never bothered us and even when we were there and it started raining, it wasn't bad enough for us to stop playing.

We put our jumpers down for goal posts and just took it in turns to go in goal while the rest of us took shots. If we played a game, 2v2, we played "goalie wag" but not today. At around half eleven it was really raining quite a lot. Everything now was as grey as my jumper, even the grass seemed grey. We'd more or less already decided to start heading back for dinner, but what sped up that decision was when a group of big lads appeared: three of them. They wanted to play with our ball. You could just tell. What made it worse was the fact that we were out of our "territory" on their patch. It was their park, not ours. We'd been happy in our childish little game and if they'd joined in it wouldn't have been the same. It would have been more serious. All the fun would have gone like it always does if an outsider joins in.

Pretending we hadn't noticed them, we quickly gathered our stuff together and legged it out of the nearest gate. We even went back a different way, not through the centre of Firth Park but round the back way past the trees. I'd never been that way before. After our beans on toast, we played a bit and watched telly for a while until mum picked us up.

Thursday morning and we're by our front door getting ready to go to Mark and Andrew's again - twice in one week: great!
"And please don't lose your coat this time," mum said with a kind (but exasperated) sigh. I collected my stuff and off we went.

When we arrived, we parked on the grass verge at the side of their house and went in through the garden to their side door and knocked. Andrew answered the door, his mum coming up behind him wiping her hands on a tea-towel. She said hello to us and then looked at Andrew as if it was the first time she'd seen him that morning.

"What have you got on?"

"What do you mean? Andrew answered, a bit surprised that she should be asking.

"That jumper. That's not yours. Where've you got that from?"

He looked down and started pulling it out to look at it, checking.

"That's my jumper!" I exclaimed. Relief flowed through my body.

"I think it is actually," said mum, standing behind me.

Andrew mumbled sorry and started to take it off. He still looked bewildered.

His mum spoke again and you could tell that she wasn't best pleased. Their carpets may have been thicker, the sun brighter, the beans on toast nicer but Mark and Andrew's mum also seemed to get far more angry than my mum or dad ever did.

"Where's yours then?"

It was coming; I could feel it.

"Erm... I don't know; I must have lost it or something." Andrew was mumbling again. He knew it was coming too.

It came...

"You've LOST it?!"