

In 1066 Harold took one in the eye at the Battle of Hastings – so legend and a piece of sewing in Normandy apparently dictates.

In 1964, the story continues. Further arrows were about to be chucked. I, the unknown Shayne Burgess, am born.

There end the similarities. I was not about to sew for starters. Needles were for the beach at Hastings. Plus, this is probably the only detail I retained from school. And nothing, absolutely zilch happened in between those dates. Given that I grew up here and signs were everywhere telling me that some battle took place in a place brilliantly called *Battle* – so not even fucking Hastings – recalling this solitary fact was not much of an achievement.

You might well have the pre-conception that actually, if I threw the darts for a living then obviously I was thick, drunk a bit of beer and was hugely overweight. School would have been something I was probably expelled from. Obviously, some of that is true and some of it isn't. So, let us correct the inaccuracies now. I drank a *shitload* of beer.

I was brought up an only child. Probably, no wonder. Mum Joyce and Dad John surely called time on the whole pro-creation thing when they had me. I am not surprised if they took one look and placed hold on their next order. The family tree confirms: my Dad threw no other darts into my Mum's bullseye.

That said, I had a really happy childhood in a completely different era. Hastings was a run of the mill seaside town but with that iconic status based on something that happened yonks ago. It was pleasant and without trouble but there was not a lot going on. Un-bloody-remarkable probably sums it up.

We lived modestly as most people seemed to do back then but we never went without. Going abroad was out of the question and besides – we were a seaside town that lived through the long hot summer of 1976. Why travel?

But we spent almost no time at all on the front. When you live here, you take it for granted to the extent that you don't bother. I went inland for fun and started fires in the forest. We would get chased by the cops and shoot air rifles for laughs. Messing about in flat lifts was standard. The obligatory throwing things out from high windows not far behind.

That was how you grew up in Hastings.

As you will read, fleeing cops, shooting air rifles and throwing things make the backbone of this story!

I was raised in Kennedy Court, one of the Four Courts high-rise flats. Mum still lives there today. I packed my bags when I turned seventeen. Adjacent to me were blocks named Bevin, Churchill and Roosevelt. Sussex County Council went through this post-war thing of naming

accommodation after Presidents – except of course, Churchill *wasn't* one.

I attended Hollington Infants and then Grove School. Sometimes. Un-bloody-remarkable too and perhaps 'occasionally visited' is better than 'attended'. They never pushed you and I rarely filled a book up. I didn't look up to or idolise any teachers. Mr Boras still haunts me... brutal in Science, smashing your leg with the rubber tube from a Bunsen burner. Back then violence was legal from staff to pupils. Or, so they thought.

I couldn't wait to get out of there. And by the age of fifteen, I did – leaving with no skillset and the assumption that I would be a builder. In fact, my only game plan was to do *something* to earn a crust.

Mum worked in a factory at night. Dad was a builder, 19 years her senior and medically retired. He did well to make a living out of it all having fallen down the tiles one day at just fourteen years old, forcing surgeons to remove his kneecap and leave him with what looked like a wooden leg. His trousers were forever two inches shorter on one side. They had to construct him a build-up a shoe. He looked like a Teddy Boy on one leg!

I am not sure if the roof or my conception were his last erection.

But – there was something in his DNA that just exuded brilliance. I must have taken *something* from it. And I knew it from virtually the age of a baby. Dad was an incredible sportsman. He was totally driven. What I understand now is that he had a focus, an instinct, and a hunger that were almost professional. What I didn't realise at the time was that they were real qualities. He was just my Dad – a scratch golfer and playing darts in the local league at least twice a week. Ordinary bloke in the street who could play a bit.

Except he wasn't. He was better than that. But because he had no greater ambition and the paths to potential glory were not as mapped out as they are today, I do not know how good he really was. Yet I do recognise that without his passion and also self-centred bloody-mindedness, I would not have picked up an arrow myself. Unless I had wandered into one of those stupid *battle* re-enactments at Battle Abbey that take place every now and then.

Mum toiled in the factory. On the nights Dad went out to play darts, I sat in the car waiting! Yep, back then kids were not allowed in the pubs of Britain but their own fathers were allowed to play darts all night, take a packet of crisps out to their son waiting for five or six hours with just colouring books for company and then drive him home well after closing time, half-pissed and half-broke.

His days roofing were over but his nights on the tiles had just begun.

Dad *was* good though, brilliant at every sport he turned his hand too. If he wasn't making you looking a dick on the golf course, he was sticking the pink right up on your arse on the

snooker table. He was amazing at every individual sport involving some sort of prop. He just loved victory. He even found himself into the annals of Hastings history, which had been pretty much blank since Harold succumbed, by becoming the only person to win the internationally renowned Town Cup for golf two years on the spin. I am pretty sure if you wander through Hastings today, just past the signs for Bexhill after the William The Conqueror gift shop, you can see the Heritage plaque marking this key event in Sussex's history.

Can you fuck?

Nor to the point is there a William The Conqueror gift shop.

Dad was a builder who lived for sport, much better at golf too than he realised. But back then, you *wouldn't* know. Scouting and broadcasting of any event were so rare. If you made it, beyond your actual skill, there was a lot of luck involved.

He was a proper man's man, smoking and drinking and fitting every stereotype of a bloke from yesteryear.

He was a sportsman who almost didn't live at home – usually out at 0430 before sunrise to play eighteen holes at dawn before playing another nine at dusk. I would often only see him during the day at weekends. He was always playing a round without playing around.

On the rare occasions that he was there, something was already embedded in the subconscious. I suppose it was actually pretty blatant that if he left you in the car twice a week while he went in to shoot some darts, you might actually wonder what it was all about. Plus, there were the trophies – he had pots of them. That was the level of obsession. But he was single-minded and single-focussed. When he was playing darts, he wouldn't touch the golf – and vice versa. It was one or the other. So, he went years without picking up an arrow or likewise a club, but he always had some sort of sporting equipment in his hand.

Apart from that, I retain few childhood memories. Perhaps I only recall Dad's sporting prowess *generally* because of its influence on me. Or possibly my friend Stella had just eroded the mind. Not a great admission less than 2000 words in your memoirs!

I do remember Mum and Dad going for picnics – quite a post war thing to do in a seaside town. They would sit there and lay out the blankets and pretend to be romantic eating their sophisticated Scotch Eggs and I would just head back to Dad's car knowing that he kept his darts in the glove box and just ping arrows at one of the many trees in the forest.

I wasn't very good but there is clearly a beginning there. Dad had rubbed off on me. With no training I had picked the things up. Suddenly, I was having a go, seeing what all the fuss about. Plus, I hated Scotch Eggs.

Somehow, I formed a habit. It was either in my genes or I had just acquired the trait from

being surrounded by it all the time. The smoking working men's club gave Dad an outlet and me, ultimately, a career.

Frankly, I was useless at everything else. At the age of five, I had fallen off a wall and completely smashed my eardrum...the doc said I would never be any good at sports. Of course, being deaf from that point in one ear meant that I never heard him.

Pretty good news really – because I turned out to be rather good at the sport of darts.

## Chapter Two

### *Limp Dick*

Good old Mr Limerick never knew that we were taking the piss all that time. He was our Maths teacher and you were supposed to almost swallow his name when announcing it so Limerick became Lim-Rick and from that the Limp Dick emerged!

To his credit and his idle penis, Limp Dick rose to the occasion. For some reason, he let us organise a darts tournament after school and we ended up staying later and later every night for about six weeks before that particular phase passed for most of our gang.

Limp Dick thought it would help our Maths. He then enlisted the Metalwork and Woodwork classes' assistance to make trophies. Nice idea. Nothing was going to improve my skills in that department.

I had opted for Home Economics instead of building shite so I wasn't responsible for the glamorous silverware on offer. Everyone's Dad seemed to be in construction so I thought I might as well learn to cook.

But it wasn't *my* Dad who got me hooked despite all those middle of the week car journeys to dark and dingy pubs. He was going through his golf phase by the time I turned fourteen and had packed up the arrows. It was my best mate from school Mark Card and his Dad Keith who really led the pack. Keith was a very good player and it was rubbing off on his lad. I had become friends with Mark and before I knew it was addicted.

Suddenly I was reading third hand their passed-on copy of *Darts World* magazine. I devoured all the write-ups on the Counties Scene and read the interviews with the few professionals that there were thinking this was some sort of one way ticket to paradise. I learned that you *could* actually make a bloody good living from darts but the most likely place to do so was by winning at venues like *Pontins* and *Butlins* of all places. There was a massive holiday camp scene – probably not the worst idea in the world either to have something sharp and pointed in your hand in amongst all that Hi-de-Hi forced bollocks!

When they ran a piece with the big Welshman, the late Leighton Rees, who went on to be

the first ever World Champion, I was in awe. I had found my first hero too in Jocky Wilson and – what seems crazy now – soon was heading off to London to buy whatever the latest fad was on the scene. Darts shops were thin on the ground on the South Coast. The nearest to home were Frank Johnsons in Brixton or Jerry's in Wimbledon. If you saw a new set of flights in the mag, then you got on the train to get them. Never mind girls, and cars and pop music. I needed to shoot that poison arrow.

So, the three biggest influences were my *golf* mad Dad, Mark and Keith Card, and some Maths teacher who broke every Health and Safety rule in the book.

Limp Dick too had soon had enough. Frankly, there was no improvement in our arithmetic. In fact, we took that less seriously because we knew that after the school day, darts was coming. So, we were always on a countdown. My other friends outside of Mark also moved onto something else in no time at all and bullseye after hours soon became a thing of the past.

Limp Dick had risen briefly only to flop again.

He had made an impression, though. I used to have to bunk off school to watch the only darts show on TV, *The Indoor league* with the former cricketer Fred Trueman which showcased games played in pubs and for some reason was screened in the middle of the afternoon as a housewife's favourite! Kids – we didn't even have video recorders then let alone iPlayers! It doesn't exactly sound an award-winner does it but between 1973 and 1978, Yorkshire Television made it into legendary stuff. And that was it for your fix of darts. The chances of anybody taking it up were therefore pretty slim.

If your Dad played, you couldn't get in the pub. If you were looking for it on the box, you had as much chance of dear old Fred equally playing shove ha'penny on telly. But more to the point, not every school had a limp dick.

Come to think of it, they probably did.

But the age of fourteen marked a turning point. Dad's single-mindedness rubbed off on me. I was hooked overnight. I had one real option if I wanted to pursue this thing. It was time to wreck the hell out of the only place a darts board would fit in our flat...Mum and Dad's living room door.