

## **'The long walk'**

**by George Layton in The Fib and other stories**

I loved it when my grandad took me out – just me and him. I never knew when I was going out with him. It just happened every so often. My mum'd say to me, 'C'mon, get ready. Your grandad's coming to take you out. Get your clogs on.' That was the one thing that spoilt it – my clogs. Whenever my grandad took me out, I had to wear a pair of clogs that he'd given to me. Well, he'd made them you see, that was his job before he retired, clogmaker. I didn't half make a noise when I was wearing them an' all. Blimey, you could hear me a mile away. I hated those clogs.

'Aw, Mum, do I have to put my clogs on?'

'Now don't ask silly questions. Go and get ready.'

'Aw, please ask Grandad if I can go without my clogs.'

'Do you want to go or don't you?'

My mum knew I wanted to go.

'Course I want to.'

'Then go and put your clogs on.'

'Oh, heck.'

Honest, I'd never seen anyone else wearing clogs. I wondered where my grandad would take me today. Last time I'd gone to the zoo with him. It was great. I was just about ready when I heard him knock at the front door. I knew it was my grandad, because he always had his own special knock. Everybody else used the bell. I could hear him downstairs, he was wearing clogs himself.

'I'm nearly ready, Grandad.'

I put on my windcheater that I'd been given last Christmas. It was maroon coloured. My friend Tony had got one as well only his was green, but I liked mine best. Then I went downstairs.

'Hello Grandad.'

My mum told me to give him a kiss.

'He's getting too big to give his old grandad a kiss, aren't you son?'

He always called me son.

'No, course not, Grandad.'

He bent down so I could kiss him on his cheek. He was all bristly and it made me laugh.

'Ooh Grandad, you haven't shaved today, have you?'

**‘The long walk’**  
**by George Layton in The Fib and other stories**

He was laughing as well. We were both laughing, we didn’t really know why, and my mum started laughing. There we were, all three of us laughing at nothing at all.

‘No, son, I haven’t shaved. But it doesn’t matter today. It’ll bother nobody else today. There’s just the two of us.’

‘Where are we going, Grandad? Where are you taking us?’

He looked at me. His eyes were watering a bit and he wiped them with a dark blue hanky he always had in his top pocket.

‘We’re going on a walk, a special walk.’

He was almost whispering, as if he didn’t want my mum to hear, bending down with his whiskery face next to mine.

‘Where are we going, Grandad? Where are we going? Is it a secret?’

‘You’ll see son, when we get there.’

He looked a bit sad for a MINUTE, but then he smiled and put on his flat cap.

‘C’mon son, let’s get going.’

My mum gave us each a pack of sandwiches, and off we went. We must have looked a funny sight walking down the road together, me and my grandad. Him dressed in his flat cap and thick overcoat and clogs. Me in my maroon windcheater and short grey trousers and clogs. But I was so happy. I didn’t know where we were going and neither did anyone else. Only Grandad knew, and only I was going to find out.

‘Are we walking all the way, Grandad?’ He took such big strides that I was half walking and half running.

‘No, son, we’ll get a trackless first to get out a bit.’

By ‘trackless’ he meant a bus, and I’d heard him say it so often that I never wondered why he said trackless.

‘I’ll show you where I used to go when I was a lad.’

We didn’t have to wait long before a bus came, and we went upstairs and sat right at the front. Grandad was out of breath when we sat down.

‘Are you all right, Grandad?’

‘Oh, aye, son. You get a better view up here.’

‘Yes Grandad, you do.’

Soon we were going through the ‘posh part’ where the snobs lived. This was on the other side of the park.

‘At one time there were no roof on’t top deck. That were before the trackless. Completely open it was – daft really.’

**‘The long walk’**  
**by George Layton in The Fib and other stories**

The conductor came round for our fares.

‘One and t’lad to the basin.’

I’d never heard of the basin before. I asked my grandad what it was.

‘What’s the basin, Grandad?’

‘That’s where we start our walk.’

‘What basin is it? Why is it called “basin”?’

‘The canal basin, it’s where the canal starts. You’ll see.’

By now we were going through a brand new shopping centre.

‘Hey look Grandad, that’s where that new bowling alley is. My friends Tony and Barry have been. They say it’s smashing.’

Grandad looked out of the window.

‘That’s where I used to play cricket a long time ago.’

‘Where the bowling alley is?’

‘That’s right, son, when they were fields. It’s all changed now. Mind, where we’re going for a walk, it’s not changed there. No, it’s just the same there.’

We heard the conductor shout ‘basin’.

‘C’mon, son, our stop, be careful now.’

While we were going down the stairs, I held tight to my grandad. Not because I thought I might fall, but I was scared for him. He looked as though he was going to go straight from the top to the bottom.

‘Are you all right, Grandad? Don’t fall.’

He just told me not to be frightened and to hold on tight.

‘That’s right, you hold on to me, son, you’ll be all right, don’t be frightened.’

We both got off the bus, and I watched it drive away.

I didn’t know where we were, but it was very quiet.

‘It’s nice here, isn’t it, Grandad?’

‘This is where my dad was born, your greatgrandad.’

It was a lovely place. There weren’t many shops and there didn’t seem to be many people either. By the bus stop there was a big stone thing full of water.

‘Hey, Grandad, is that where the horses used to drink?’

‘That’s right, son. I used to hold my grandad’s horse there while it was drinking.’

I couldn’t see anything like a basin.

I wondered where it was.

‘Where’s the basin, Grandad?’

‘We’ve got to walk there. C’mon.’

We went away from the main street, into a side street, past all these little houses. I don’t think any cars ever went down this street because there was washing strung out right across the road all the way down the street.

## **‘The long walk’**

**by George Layton in The Fib and other stories**

Outside some of the houses were ladies washing the front step and scraping that yellow stone on the edges. A lot of the houses had curtains over the front door, so you could leave the door open and the wind didn’t blow in.

Mind you, it wasn’t cold even though it was October. It was nice. The sun was shining, not hot, but just nice. When we got further down the street, I saw that it was a cul-de-sac.

‘Hey, Grandad, it’s a dead end. We must’ve come the wrong way.’

Grandad just smiled.

‘Do you think that I’m that old, that I can’t remember the way? Here, look.’

He took my hand and showed me the way. Just before the last house in the road was a tiny snicket. It was so narrow that we had to go through behind each other. I wouldn’t even have noticed this snicket if my Grandad hadn’t shown it to me.

‘Go on, son, through there.’

It was very dark and all you could see was a little speck of light at the other end, so you can tell how long it was.

‘You go first, Grandad.’

‘No, after you, son.’

I didn’t want to go first.

‘No, you’d better go first, Grandad. You know the way, don’t you?’

He laughed and put his hand in his pocket and brought out a few boiled sweets.

‘Here you are. These are for the journey. Off we go for the last time.’

I was just going to ask him what he meant, but he carried on talking. ‘I mean it’ll soon be winter, won’t it? Come on.’

And off we went through the dark passage. Grandad told me that when he was a kid they used to call it the Black Hole of Calcutta. Soon we reached the other end and it was quite strange because it was like going through a door into the country. We ended up at the top of some steps, high up above the canal basin, and you could see for miles. I could only see one barge though, in the basin. We went down the steps. There were a hundred and fifteen steps – I counted them. Grandad was going down slowly so I was at the bottom before him.

‘Grandad, there are a hundred and fifteen steps there. C’mon, let’s look at that barge.’

I ran over to have a look at it and Grandad followed me.

‘It’s like a house isn’t it, Grandad?’

‘It is a house. Someone lives there. C’mon, let’s sit here and have our sandwiches.’

And we did.

## **‘The long walk’**

**by George Layton in The Fib and other stories**

The sun was very big and round, though it wasn't very hot, and the leaves on the trees were golden, and the reflection in the water made the canal look golden. There was nobody else about, and all the noises that you never notice usually suddenly sounded special, different. Like the siren that let the workers know it was dinner time. I've heard sirens lots of times since then but they never sound so sweet. The same with the train. It must have been miles away because I couldn't see any steam or anything, and you had to listen quite hard, but behind the hum of the country and town sounds mixed together you could hear this knockety-knock.

When we'd finished our sandwiches we walked along the canal. Grandad showed me how to open the lock gates, and we were both puffed out afterwards because it was hard work. After a while we walked away from the canal, up a country lane. I don't suppose we were really that far away from home, but we seemed to be miles out in the country, and soon we came to a village. My Grandad said we'd catch a bus home from there, but first he wanted to show me something, and he took hold of my hand. I didn't have a clue where he was taking me, but I got a shock when we ended up in the graveyard. It had gone cold now. I wanted to go home.

‘C'mon, Grandad, let's go home now.’

But he didn't seem to be listening properly.

‘In a minute, son, I just want to show you summat.’

And hand in hand we walked among the gravestones.

‘There you are son, there's my plot. That's where I'll be laid to rest.’

I didn't know what to say.

‘When, Grandad?’

‘Soon.’

He smiled and looked very happy and he bent down and pulled out a couple of weeds. It was a very neat plot.

‘C'mon, son, we'd best get going now.’

When I told my mum that night that Grandad was going to die soon, she got very cross and told me not to talk like that.

‘He's as fit as a fiddle is your grandad. Don't you talk like that.’

It happened three days later, at dinner time. It came as a great shock to everybody, except of course to me and Grandad.