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My mother was a Cub mistress, a pillar of society - a churchgoer, a very well-thought-of person. So I was dragged into Cubs screaming and shouting - I was more the roguish type - although I did come to love it. I went to 'Park Grove Academy for Young

Gentlemen' (that's what we called the secondary modern!). I hated it. I was never academic, I was more the physical type - I was the top athlete in the school. I wanted to be a gymnast. But in lessons, I'd always be looking out the windows dreaming...

I'd rather be out playing.

They'd knocked down an old council estate, and we spent most of our time in the old buildings. We'd climb the walls, we'd make catapults. Because people were moving out of these old houses to new houses with proper inside toilets, hot and cold water, they left all their potties, bowls, old furniture behind. So we used to put the potties on a wall and smash them with catapults. Probably a lot of them were antiques. Then somebody would say, "Look out, there's a bobby coming!" Peter Hall, the local PC. You'd hear a voice: "You tell your mothers I'll be round to see them!" So then you'd have to tell your

mother that the bobby was coming - she'd be horrified! He'd always make a point of ringing his bell accidentally-on-purpose outside your house, just to humiliate your mother, and then he'd come and tell her, "Yes, Mrs Holden, he was caught on the building site and it's dangerous". I'd get a clip round the ear, burn the catapult on the fire and be sent to bed. And then it would be, "Right then, Peter, would you like a cup of tea?" "Oh yes, Betty, that'd be lovely!" You see, he was a cub master and she was a cub mistress! And in the morning I'd make a new catapult.

In those days after the war, you were

categorised. There was a shortage of builders, joiners, engineers, and you were funnelled into that - even if I'd have preferred to become a PT teacher or go into the Army. So I was apprenticed and started this job in 1974. I'm the longest serving member of the hospital's staff! A lot has changed since then...when I started, there was one manager, John Shelton, who ran the County Hospital and this place, with just one assistant, two foremen and a part-time secretary!

Where Maternity is now, it was an open ward. It was in the days when you could smoke. Somebody had put their ash in a bin and it had started a small

fire. The nurses were panicking: "There's a fire!" Then one old nurse came up to this old man who was having a wee on his bedpan. "Are you finished with that, Mr _____?" she said, and then she took it and threw it on the fire and put it out!

Where the lobby is now, where Costa is, it used to be a water garden. It was supposed to be calming for the patients. We put some pumps in for the fountains. These pumps delivered about 120,000 litres of water a minute! There was more water up there in the sky than there was in the ponds. They didn't leave those pumps in for long, they replaced them with normal garden pumps

pretty quickly!

We used to have these Sluicemasters, called Clinomatics, to get rid of bedpans and bottles. If you put too many bottles with urine in them, it would jam and it would trip out. There was a little hole in the side, and if you put a piece of wire in it - which all the lads carried in their pockets - you could reset it. It was bad practice - if you missed it you could maybe give yourself a shock. But the nurses always wanted to see what was going on. So this nurse was looking while I was doing this, and - to distract her - I said, "You just kick the machine here a bit!" and I gave the machine a kick while I put the wire in. Two weeks

later, the electrician came down and said, "Who's told that nurse to kick that Clinomatic! She's kicking it to bits!"

Another time, it was a bank holiday, and my boss John Shelton asked me if I'd do a bit of overtime burning rubbish, so the incinerator lad could have the weekend off. So I came in, and while I was there burning rubbish, a young lad was there doing some work on the incinerator. He asked what I was burning, and I told him, "Oh, the odd leg, this, that and the other." He looked very pale at that. So I went and got a little box, made a hole in the bottom, surrounded it with cotton wool, put some tomato

sauce in it, and put my finger through. I said to him, "Look, this is the sort of thing we burn," and opened the box and wiggled my finger. I thought he was going to mess himself!

We had an old labourer, a biggish fella. I got a call from the cleaners one evening: "Dave, we've got to clean the toilets and showers, but the toilet door's been locked for hours, we've had a look underneath and someone's in there. Can you come and take a look?" So I came down and took a look - well, there were the labourer's boots and overalls under the door. I climbed up on the next door toilet to look over the wall, I was

really apprehensive...and there was the boots, with a pair of overalls in them and stuffed with paper. It was a fitter and a plumber who'd done it.

We have a big liquid oxygen plant in the Works Department. There are two big condensers and they can freeze up. When it starts to thaw the frost cracks and pings off them. One time our electrical manager is going home and rides past these things on his bike. He calls out, "Someone's shooting at me!" So we call the police, they come with machine guns, shotguns...turns out all it is, is this frost, pinging off the condensers!

