

A LIFE IN STORIES

The things I remember

A fictional example from Worth the Telling.

Worth the Telling

Contents

Choose a title to go to that page.

Growing up	2
Well, it knows you're coming now	2

Growing up

Well, it knows you're coming now

Funny what you keep. There's a bent bolt in a tobacco tin in my shed now. No tobacco in it. Washers, bits of string, that sort of thing. That bolt is from the gate. My daughter asked me why I kept a useless bolt. I couldn't explain it very well.

Well, Dad's gate. That's what I was going to tell you. The bottom hinge was never quite right after that.

We were outside Hague, on the farm. I was sixteen, I think. Don't ask me the year because I couldn't tell you. He had this old grain truck. You had to pull on the door to get it shut. That's nothing to do with the gate, except it was that truck.

My brother could back it through there. I wanted to do it without somebody standing beside me telling me which way to turn. Dad was always there, you see. Checking. I thought he didn't believe I could do anything. Well, anything with a motor.

Anyway, I backed into the gatepost. Not fast. Just enough. The gate dropped and there was this awful scrape along the truck. I remember sitting there with the engine still running. Then I shut it off. I didn't get out straight away.

Dad came over from the shed. I thought, well, that's the end of me driving. He came to my window first. He didn't even look at the scrape. "Are you hurt?" That's what he said. I said no. Then I started telling him about the mirror, how you couldn't see properly on that side. It was a perfectly good mirror. I was making excuses.

He let me finish. That was worse than being interrupted, somehow. Then he said, "Well, come and have a look at your gate." Your gate. It had been his gate when I climbed into the truck.

I thought he'd fetch my brother to sort it out. My brother was good with his hands. But Dad looked at the broken hinge, then sent me for the jack and the toolbox. He stayed there waiting for me. He wasn't sending me away. That's the part I hadn't expected.

We put the jack under the gate. The old bolt wouldn't come out because I'd bent it. Dad held the spanner on one side and I worked the other. I kept turning it the wrong way. He'd tap the handle with his finger. That way. He never took it out of my hand.

Then we had to lift the gate to get the new bolt lined up. He was holding most of the weight. I was fumbling, dropping the washer. He said his wrist was giving him trouble. I'd never heard him say something like that. I told him I'd hold it. We changed places and he put the bolt through. We were both filthy by then.

It still hung a little crooked. I said it wasn't much of a repair. He opened it, closed it, then said, "Well, it knows you're coming now." I laughed. Dad didn't make many jokes. I put the bent bolt in my pocket while we were picking up the tools. He didn't say much about it after.

The next Saturday he handed me the keys again. "Have another go." Just that. I was waiting for a list of instructions. He didn't give me one. I went through so slowly you could have walked past me. He was standing by the shed, and when I was clear he lifted his hand. I remember that little wave.

I still think about that afternoon more than some of the big things, if you know what I mean. I hadn't thought about the Saturday bit for years. I'd always told it as the time I damaged Dad's truck. But he gave me the keys again. And when his wrist hurt, he let me take the weight. For a minute he needed me. I hadn't understood that about him before. I thought being a father meant knowing everything and never needing anybody.

That's what I'd tell my daughter now, about the bolt. It isn't really the accident I want to remember.

It's him tapping the spanner with his finger instead of taking it out of my hand.