

FRIENDLY STREET
By the Good Companions

Song and Kitty taps:

*Grab your coat and get your hat
 Leave your worries on the door step
 Just direct your feet
 To the sunny side of the street
 (Kitty starts tapping)
 Can you hear that pitter-pat
 And that happy tune is your step
 Life can be so sweet
 On the sunny side of the street
 I used to walk in the shade
 With my blues on parade
 Now I'm not afraid
 This rover crossed over
 If you haven't got a cent
 You're as rich as Rockerfeller
 Gold dust at your feet
 On the sunny side of the street*

Names, DOB, Addresses:

Lily Fry, born 1924, at 10 Marsh Street Isle of Dogs
 Eileen Hart, born 1924, at 18 Storks Road, Bermondsey
 Hilda Shingler, born 1929, at 82 Angel Lane, Stratford
 Joan Woolfe, born 1931, at 128 East Street Charlton
 Kitty Welch, born 1933 at 5 Riley Buildings, Deptford

Still Images of childhood come to life

Joan, I'm tap-dancing with my friends June and Jean outside the pub next to my house. There's a beer cellar with a wooden cover and we like to dance on that cos it makes a good sound

Eileen, When I was 3, we moved house on a wheelbarrow. All the furniture was piled up high, and I was sat on a chair at the top and I was wheeled through the streets to my new home

Lil, I'm with my friends standing by the river. We're not supposed to be down by the shore and my mum mustn't find out. Oh dear I've got my feet wet.

Kit, I'm playing by the river with my friends, climbing down the ladder and on to the barges. Then we pick up stones on the shore and throw them in the river

Hilda, I'm leaning against the wall in the street outside my house, waiting to be allowed to join in the skipping

School Days:

School bell rings.

All: *School days, school days, old golden rule days*

Song: *Jesus loves me, this I know
Cos the Bible tells me so*

Hilda: 'My name's Hilda, what's your name.'

Eileen: 'I don't like it here. I want to go home.'

Kit: 'I liked the bottle of warm milk, and then we had a sleep on our little tiny beds.'

Joan: 'I liked the story, that was nice. I want to hear some more of that story.'

Lil: 'They gave me a slate and pencil.'

*Jesus bids me shine with a clear blue light
Like a little candle burning in the night
In this world of darkness, Jesus bids me shine
You in your small corner and I in mine*

Lil: I went to school at three, and you actually started learning immediately. You learned the alphabet (*everybody chants ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP*) and they gave you a slate and pencil (*Everyone pretends to write letters on a slate*) and you learned to write. (*Lil illustrates this in the air, while others struggle with A B and C*). And you learned how to count to ten. (*Everyone counts the fingers on one hand with the other*) In the afternoon they'd put you down on a camp bed to go to sleep for two hours. (*Everyone pretends to go to sleep*) The school was right opposite where I lived, so my mum just took me across the road to the school gate. (*She walks forward, big waves and smiles goodbye*)

Kit: We went past a bakers shop (*Kit crosses stage buying and eating bun*) Mum bought me a doughnut and I ate it on the way.

Hilda: My brother Len was a bit of a tearaway and he used to pretend he had a motorbike and he'd rev up outside the street door.

Eileen: (*revving up imaginary motorbike*) Come on Hilda! Jump on the back!

Hilda: So you had to hold on to his jersey and we'd run all the way to school.

Children march in to school:

Fall in and follow me

Fall in and follow me

Never mind a bit about the weather

All together

Stand by me boys

I know the way to go (bit of PT drill here)

I'll take you on a spree

You do as I do and you'll do right

Fall in and follow me

Eileen: I was left-handed. (Puts out left hand)

Hilda: And me. (Same)

Kitty: me too. (Same)

Lil: So was I. (Same) Teacher said:

Joan: Put your left hand behind your back. (*The others all do*) If you use it, I'll tie it up.

Eileen: In those days you weren't allowed to write with your left hand. (*Everyone holds imaginary pen in left hand and then transfers it to right. Write very slowly*) The teachers insisted you wrote with your right. My teacher tied my left hand behind me. (*Everyone puts left hand behind and looks pained*) Looking back, I think that's why I always hated school, because of being left-handed and them being so against it.

Lil: My Dad was so cross when they did that to me, that he came up to the school and said: (*as Dad to Joan as teacher*) Your job is to teach my daughter, not punish her for being left-handed.

Lil: Well, I never heard a word about it after that. It was the only time Dad ever came to the school.

Street play:

(*everyone bounces ball and passes under knee on the 'airy' bit*)

Bouncing Song: *One two three alairy*

My ball's down the airy

Don't forget to give it to Mary

Not to Charlie Chaplin

Lil: As children we played out in the street. There was no danger and no problem with traffic, only the odd horse and cart and you'd hear that coming. (*All make clip clop horses hooves as cart crosses from right to left, pointing as it passes.*)

Hilda: And you'd all jump on the back of the cart (*They all jump on the back in a ragged group, till Hilda as driver calls out*) 'Ere get off you rotten kids! (*All drop off*)

The group illustrate the games played: *do your game and carry on while others come in so that the street fills up*)

Hilda: I loved whip and top. You'd wind the string round the top and pull. I was terrific at that.

Kit: I played penny up the wall

Joan: I liked Hopscotch

Eileen: I liked roller skating

Lil: Cigarette card flicking

Kit and Joan: And we played cat's cradle

(*Everyone does cat's cradle in 2s sideways on to audience, one holding hands out parallel and the other passing strings under and over*)

2 balls against the wall

Song: *One two three alairy*

Five four down the airing

Don't forget to give it to Mary

Early in the morning

Joan: We did a very complicated one, something like this:

Upsy Clapsy Round the World Backsy

Right hand Left hand

Touch your heel Touch your toe

Round the back Under we go

(Everyone tries it and gets in a muddle)

All: Ooh can't do that

Hilda: There was a second hand shop opposite and my mum used to give me tuppence and say "Go and ask Mr Nan if he's got any frocks to fit you." Well I got this dress and put it on. It was lovely, and I went out to play.

Eileen: *(laughing and jeering)* Hey, Hilda, you've got my frock on.

Hilda: No I haven't.

Eileen: Yes you have. My mum gave it to the rag and bone man last week. *(to others)* and it doesn't even fit her. *(they laugh)*

Hilda: I used to feel awful.

(Kids jeer and point)

Skipping Rhymes:

All: Salt mustard vinegar pepper, Salt mustard vinegar pepper

Hilda: The children'd all be skipping in the street and you'd all play together. But the girl who owned the rope had all the power.

(Kitty and Joan hold rope, Lil skipping)

Eileen: *(to the others from outside the game)* Whose game is it?

Lil: Mine. It's my rope.

Eileen: Can I play?

Lil: Well, you've got to give me a sweet or something. *(Eileen takes sweet out of mouth. Lil inspects it, is satisfied, wipes it on jumper and pops it in her mouth. Eileen joins game.)*

Hilda: They wouldn't let you just play. You had to give them something, a bite of your apple or something and you'd bribe your way into the game. I used to stand up against the wall on one leg, waiting to be allowed to join in. I had no pride at all.

All: Jelly on the plate, jelly on the plate, wibble wobble wibble wobble, jelly on the plate

Joan: *(to Lil, who trips)* You're out.

Lil: No I'm not.

All: Yes you are.

Joan: Come on Hilda it's your go. *(Lil turns rope for them with Margaret)*

Hilda: So you'd join in.

All: All jump together girls, Never mind the weather girls.

Hilda: And just when you got to skip, you'd hear *(calling as her Mum)* 'Hilda, go and get me a pound of sugar' or one of the girls'd say:

Joan: Your dad says he wants you to get him his penny paper and 5 weights.

Hilda: He wouldn't go and get them himself. And you'd have to go, and then it was hard to get back into the game. *(She stands outside the game looking on)*

All: Apple raspberry marmalade tart, Tell me the name of your sweetheart

Hilda: And when she'd had enough, the girl who owned the rope said:

Lil: It's my rope and I'm going home now.

Hilda: And that was it.

All: Ahh ... what should we play now?

Joan: And then we'd all play Grandmother's Footsteps *(All creep up on Joan and she turns and catches them, repeat and freeze)*

The River:

Lil: As children, we all lived near the river

Joan: *(with Lil)* There were all these pubs along the river. Near us was the Anchor and Hope and you used to sit on the edge of the river and have a drink of lemonade.

Lil: 'Look Joan at that ship going up to the docks now, look. My dad said that if you look at the flags you know where it came from, and that is a Norwegian flag. It is, honestly, it is.'

Eileen: (*Joins them*) Saturday night would be the pub, would it? Kids weren't allowed in the pub. You always had to wait outside. You'd hear them singing inside. (? *Quick burst of 'My Old Man said 'Follow the van.....'* And you'd be standing there outside in the cold doing nothing. I hated that!

Joan: (*All cluster together*) Sometimes there'd be a little porch to shelter in. They'd give you an arrowroot biscuit.

Eileen: It was like a dog's biscuit. Every now and again, someone would come outside and say,

Hilda: (*as bloke*) "You alright? Here, have a biscuit!" (*Going indoors, shouting*) Hang on, It's my round.

Eileen: And you'd already just had a big one. Even now I don't like pubs.
(People behind *Finish My old man*)

The Big Ships and Tower Bridge

Joan: We've always lived near the river. Every Sunday afternoon we used to walk along the bank. I remember one particular day when I was about six, before the war, and there was great excitement. (*Everyone gathers to look*) This big liner, the Mauritania, came up the river at high tide. The promenade was packed with people to see this. Then out of the blue from the right there was this amazing ship, the biggest ship I've ever seen. I was scared and you could see the bow coming round the corner first. It was quite exciting.

Eileen: My grandmother lived in a big house overlooking the River Thames just beside Tower Bridge. (*The cast make a sculpture of Tower Bridge and the road on both sides of it*) When a big ship came along, my cousin Connie and I used to run into my grandmother's house. 'Come on lets go up in the bedroom and watch it go through' We'd look out the window and we'd see Tower Bridge opening up. (*The cast show the bridge opening up in the middle*) All the traffic would stop, all the horses and carts, and they'd have to wait while the boat went through. That would happen at least three times a day.

Hilda: (*Stepping forward*) When I worked the markets with my father, we'd go to Tower Bridge Road Market on the horse and cart with my father. When the bridge would open up, I'd get off the cart and I'd stand there, everybody did, just watching the ships go by. It was a beautiful sight. Then when the big boat'd gone through, they'd ring a bell (*bell rings*) and the bridge would close up again. (*cast show bridge closing up*) My dad would call me: Come on Hilda, quick, get back on the cart, we're going."

Hilda: (*Hilda gets back in line*) Then there'd be loads of noise as vehicles began moving again and off we'd go. (*The cast show the traffic moving again, with them becoming the carts and lorries and drivers crossing in both directions!*)

Song: Barrowboy

*All my life I've wanted to be a barrowboy
 A barrow boy I always wanted to be
 I own the title
 It sticks to me with pride
 I'm a coster, a coster from over the other side
 I turn me back upon the whole of society
 I'm sleeping where the weeping willows grow
 Two pots a shilling
 That's how I earn me living
 I ought to have been a barrow boy years ago
 Get off me barrow
 I ought to have been a barrow boy years ago*

Underscore Old Father Thames ...

Eileen: The river was supposed to be a no-go area for children. It was so dangerous. But during the summer there was always a child that got drowned in the river, always. You know it was like the bush telegraph. (*Everyone gathers, looking concerned, scanning the water*) Somebody would say they'd lost their boy ... They would swim off the steps that led to the river and because of the tides they'd get trapped round the barges, and that's mostly how they drowned.

*Old Father Thames keeps rolling along
 Down to the might sea*

Kit's story about peanuts.

All us children used to go down to the warehouses near the river. We weren't really allowed to go in there. The warehouses were quite dangerous because of the sacks of food, peanuts, all sorts of things, piled up and stacked high. You could hardly move in there. We'd go in and take the peanuts and take them home to our mums. On this particular Friday, my sister had left school, as it was the Friday after her fourteenth birthday. She came down to join us kids in the warehouse. And as she come in, she looked up and saw that this great stack of sacks was about to fall. She shouted a warning and pushed the smaller children out the way. But the sacks of peanuts fell on her and her leg was crushed. Someone ran up to tell our mum. My mum could not stop crying. Florrie was taken by ambulance to the hospital where something was done to her leg and a few days later she was transferred to a big hospital up in Yorkshire. We didn't have the money for everyone to go and visit her, but my mum used to go up sometimes. Florrie was in hospital for five and a half years. She had to learn to walk again.

Eileen: In Dockhead, where our Parish Church was, you'd find more Irish names than they've got in Ireland! There were always Reillys, Flannaghans, O'Sullivan's, Kennedys and a lot of the families were connected with work on the river and the docks. Each Catholic Church had its own special day when there was an outdoor procession through the streets. (*cue from Olive for humming Hail queen of heaven tune under Eileen's speech*) I think ours was some time in June. Oh yes, that was a

big occasion. I've got a photograph where I was all dressed up: white shoes and socks and a white dress, like a bride. The Catholics would have the altars out, the statues and the candles and the flowers. They would go through the streets carrying a statue of Mary and we'd sing.

Song: Star of the Sea

*Mother of Christ, star of the sea,
Pray for the wanderer, pray for me*

Eileen: *(with cast humming underneath)* And then the priest would go round and bless the houses with the statue. And you'd go round again in the evening. It was like a festival!

*Ave, Ave Ave Maria
Ave, Ave Ave Maria*

Insert something about day trips to Southend by ship, a great treat

Song

*Cruising down the river on a Sunday afternoon
With one you love, the sun above, waiting for the moon
The old accordion playing a sentimental tune
Cruising down the river on a Sunday afternoon.*

The Funeral

Eileen: When someone died in the street, everyone got to know about it very quickly.

All: *Whispering together as the news spreads.*

Lil: The open coffin would have been laid out on trestles in the front room. My granddad died when I was little. My gran said to me 'would you like to see your granddad before the lid is screwed down' and I said 'No, thank you Gran, I'd rather not.' – I was a bit scared.

Kitty: 'I remember seeing my little brother laid out in the front room in a little white coffin. He was dressed all in white, so beautiful. He looked just like a little angel.'

Eileen: 'When I was about eight years old my grandfather died and my mother bought me a lovely black coat with a fur collar from the insurance money. Oh, it was really nice. On the day of the funeral my grandmother said to me "Come along Eileen, come and say goodbye to your granddad." Well, I didn't want to go, but I went in and when I saw him, I thought, my goodness, he looks better than what he did alive. I never did like him very much anyway.'

Lil: When someone died there would be a collection throughout the street. They would go to everybody and people would put in what they could afford. They would write down the name of each person. With the money they would buy a wreath in the shape of

a vacant chair that would be put in front of the house on the day of the funeral along with all the other wreaths.

Kit: The undertaker was a very tall man, Mr Bearfoot. On top of his head he had a big black top hat and a long black overcoat down to his ankles and a stick. They would all walk down the street, with Mr Bearfoot in front.

Joan: Behind him would come the hearse, a black coach with the coffin in it, drawn by two or even four black horses. They had great big black feathered plumes on their heads which they would they often used shake and toss about.

Kit: They used to stop outside the pub where the person used to drink. Everyone would take their hats off as a mark of respect. Then the procession would start again.

Eileen: After the funeral all the neighbours would go back to the house for the funeral tea. Sandwiches and drink.

Joan: And that's when the trouble sometimes started. When my grandmother died, all these relatives that we hadn't seen for years turned up. Her eldest daughter, my aunt, was actually doing my grandmothers' bits of washing in the sink, and my mother said: (*as Mother*) It's a pity you couldn't have done that years ago when she was still alive and we needed the help. Where were you then?

Joan: And then the relatives started helping themselves to what they wanted. They were like vultures.

Hilda: I'm going to have that sewing machine, she promised me that about 30 years ago.

Lil: Oh no, I want that. Well all right then, I'll take that Westminster chime clock instead.

Eileen: How about that vase over there in the corner?

Joan: And they were even arguing over the jewellery.

Kit: That ring is definitely mine.

Hilda: I gave her that necklace and I'm having it back.

Joan: My mum burst into tears, cos of course she'd looked after Gran on her own all those years. Ooh it was terrible.

Song:

*Look at the coffin, bloomin brass handles
Ain't it grand to be bloomin' well dead
Look at the tombstone, bloomin great knobs on
Ain't it grand to be bloomin' well dead*

The war, leaving home and objects remembered/kept:

Hilda: Three of us were evacuated during the war years and when we came back to London, everything felt different. Some of us came back to completely different houses.

Eileen: The war changed everything. Communities were broken up.

Lil: People moved miles away from where they were born, perhaps they were re-housed in other parts of London.

Joan: We were thinking about what we had kept from our childhood homes, perhaps something we still have to this day. I've still got this framed photo of my grandmother.

Hilda: I've still got a wooden elephant I liked when I was little.

Lil: I always loved reading. When I left home to get married, the one thing I remembered to take with me was a little book, 'A Poetic Keepsake.' It's a very ancient copy in a leather cover and it's falling apart, but I've still got it now.

Kitty: One thing I have kept from those days was a little red felt heart with 'Kitty I love you' embroidered on it by my sister Florrie. She made it for me when she was in hospital in Yorkshire after her accident. I took that with me and I've still got it.'

Eileen: The house I grew up in was badly bombed in the war and I never lived in it after that, but I kept the key of the door and I've still got it. *(She shows key)* Talking about those streets where we grew up, we all remembered how noisy and busy they were. You knew everyone and everyone knew you. Especially as children, your neighbours were your friends and your friends were your neighbours.

Friends and Neighbours

All sing. *Kitty tap dances*

*When you've got friends and neighbours
All the world is a happier place
Friends and Neighbours
Put a smile on the gloomiest face
Just take your little troubles and share them
With the folks next door
Makes it twice as easy to bear them
That's what friends are for
Cos if you've friends and neighbours
That is something money won't buy
You can hold your head up high
Although you've not a penny
And your house may be tumbling down
With friends and neighbours
You're the richest man in town.*