



And every evening at sun-down  
I ask a blessing on the town  
For whether we last the night or no  
I'm sure is always touch-and-go

We are not wholly bad or good  
Who live our lives under Milk Wood,  
And Thou, I know, wilt be the first  
To see our best side, not our worst.

From "Under Milk Wood" (The Sunset Poem) by Dylan Thomas

Our monthly meetings are held on the first Friday of every month in the Village Hall, Arcadia Road, Burnham-on-Crouch CMO 8EF. Doors open 2.15pm; meeting starts 2.30pm. Full list of dates: p.3.

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# Winston Churchill (Tony Harris)

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It's quite staggering that Tony Harris arrived – wearing a check shirt and carrying 'umpteens' shopping bags – then emerged from the wings resplendent as Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill. Tony's first remark, as Winston, was that had Germany invaded, people could escape to Burnham as the invading forces "*would never have found it*".

Churchill was born in 1874 at Blenheim Palace. His Great-Grandfather was the Duke of Marlborough, but Winston's father Randolph was a second son, and therefore 'only' a Lord which is not a hereditary title. Churchill's mother was an American heiress Jeanette 'Jenny' Jerome, witty and vivacious. Winston's father was an orator and politician who died at the young age of 45 with syphilis.

Lord Randolph became Viceroy to Ireland and young Churchill aged 3 looked out at soldiers parading and turned to his Nanny and said "*Woomany, I would like to be a soldier*" and Woomany (that was Winston's name for his Nanny) replied "*you will be Prime Minister*". Super Nanny!

Churchill was sent to boarding school where he admits to being a 'duffer'. Tony asked how many of us were duffers at school and quite a lot of hands were raised! Surprisingly, Churchill passed exams and gained a place at Harrow. Being red-haired and not good at games, Churchill was bullied and often friendless. His mother never visited the young boarder except when Winston had been caught smoking, breaking school rules; his mother was summoned to Harrow where she told him he brought shame on the family. Churchill did not smoke cigarettes again.

Winston had dyspraxia, a condition that can cause a lack of coordination. As a schoolboy he fell from a tree into a very shallow river sustaining severe injuries and, throughout his life, he suffered from an injured shoulder, damaged when he fell off a gangplank whilst serving in India.

It was expected that boys from well-to-do families took commissions in the army and in 1895 he joined the Queens Hussars as a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant. Non-issue dress for officers had to be purchased but Winston's mother was 'careful' with money so young Winston supplemented his allowance by writing. At 18, as well as being a serving soldier, he became a war correspondent sending dispatches from his postings. The first being Cuba, which was where he developed the taste for cigars, taking back to England with him 1,000 of the large – 8 inch – cigars, subsequently named after him.

Tony's 'Churchillian' dress, voice and mannerisms held his audience and indeed at one point he saw a lady peering in through the back window. Perhaps she was wondering at what or who she was seeing and we were watching?

Young Winston served in many parts of the world seeing conflicts in Cuba, India, the North-West Frontier (now Pakistan), the Sudan and twice in South Africa in the Boer Wars. Overall, he was decorated 37 times, even escaping from being a prisoner of war to re-join his troop-ship. As a war correspondent he often wrote about himself – the gallant young cavalry soldier – and these dispatches made him famous.

Retiring from the army, Winston became involved in politics and was given the supposedly safe Tory seat of Oldham: he came fourth out of five! Recognising he needed a different approach Winston moved there, and in 1900 he became MP for Manchester North. He was only on the back benches however, which Tony explained was like the u3a, the front benchers – the committee – do all the work whilst the back benchers – us – drink tea, listen to speakers and then go home! Winston spent 8 years as a back bencher yearning to be more involved. This led to him ‘crossing the floor’ to be a Liberal front bencher (crossing back again some years later). At this Tony had us booing or cheering depending on our political leanings based purely on what side of the hall we were on! Once on the front – Liberal – bench, Winston became the youngest Home Secretary, he was personally involved with the siege of Sidney Street where Latvian criminals armed with guns were traced and cornered. This led to his promotion to First Lord of the Admiralty (author’s note: *‘now he is the ruler of the Queen’s Navy’* comes to mind).

Tony’s portrayal of Winston took us through his triumphs and disasters during two world wars; the catastrophe of Gallipoli, his feeling of being a lone voice fearing the rise of Nazism in Germany, the pride of being on the balcony with the King and Queen with 400,000 people chanting his name and then the disappointment of losing his parliamentary seat 8 weeks later. At 75 Winston rose from the opposition back into government and became the first Prime Minister to work with the young Queen Elizabeth II.

Winston retired from politics to live in warmer climes, to paint, lecture and write. He suffered a massive stroke which robbed him of his voice but on his death bed, with his wife Clemmie and family by his side he drank a large whisky and then uttered the words *‘I’m bored with all of this’* and died, aged 90.

Tony scattered his highly informative and interesting talk with many famous and not so famous anecdotes about Sir Winston Churchill including one of the greatest tributes of all times *‘Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few’*. During question time, Tony became himself and spoke about his diverse repertoire of characters including Mrs Thatcher and Robin Hood. He intimated that a certain Mr. Trump may be in the offing one day and I am sure I am not alone when I say **that** I would love to see!

**Judi Embling**