



## **Sterlington Stairlift Stories for Children**

by Philip W Baker

### **The Techies**

Most mums, sisters, wives and girlfriends know that boys like playing around with things that are mechanical or electrical, or electronic. Especially if they move or make strange noises.

We know that people who make stairlifts are very clever and know a lot of things about metals, plastic and electricity and other things. But most of them are adults and went to school and college to learn about those things.

Alan Hobbs seemed to know about them as if he was born with a brain full of cleverness. Ever since he was a toddler he knew the right things to do.

One day his mum left the gas cooker turned on without anything there to cook. Alan knew it was wrong and she must have forgotten, so he toddled over and turned it off.

His mum came rushing in a few minutes later and said “Did I leave the gas on?” She put her hand above it and felt some heat so she knew it had only just been turned off. “Did you turn it off?” she asked Alan. He just grinned.

“Well”, said mum, “You are a very clever boy, but be careful because cookers can be dangerous. If you see left on again just come and tell me please!”

Alan nodded in his toddler's way and she knew he understood.

When he was two years old Alan got a very nice birthday present from one of his uncles. It was called a TechMech set and had lots of pieces of metal with holes in, screws, nuts, washers, spanners, electric motors, wheels, and other things he could use for making things. There were some spanners and screwdrivers too.

On the box were pictures of things you could build, like a car which was moved along by the electric motor, a windmill, a crane, an aeroplane with a propeller that spun round very fast, and lots of other super gadgets.

Most boys, (and some girls, but not many) don't start making things with sets of parts like that until they are older, but Alan was an early starter and liked to get on with things.

As soon as he was old enough his mum took him along to a children's play group called “The Wise Owls”. He stayed there with the other children for a few hours on some days of the week and joined in the games and things they did.

The people who looked after the children at The Wise Owls group were quite clever and thought of some very interesting things for the children to make from pieces of paper, card, wood, and other things. Alan loved it.

An interesting thing happened there! Another boy named Bernard Schooley was also very clever and Mrs Sharpe who was in charge at The Wise Owls knew she had two very technical children in her group.

Mrs Sharpe sat the boys together to see how they got on. She had a box full of parts from an old mincing machine and put it in the middle of a long table in the centre of the room. “See what you can do with this”, she said to Alan and Bernard.

They took the bits out from the box and laid them on the table then started to put them together. Without saying a word to each other they just seemed to know what to do and how to work with each other. In a few minutes the whole mincer was back together.

It had a clamp for fixing it to the edge of a table and Alan held it up straight in the right place while Bernard tightened the screw to fix it there. They even got that bit right because Bernard was quite a big boy and was very strong. Mrs Sharpe knew it was hard to tighten the mincer screw and guessed the boys had worked out who should do it.

She was also very pleased that Bernard and Alan got on without having to talk much, because Bernard was a bit deaf and couldn't always hear what other children in the group were saying to him.

Another good thing that happened was that Bernard got an electrical set on his birthday.

Just like Alan's TechMech set it had a box full of bits for building things with.

But instead of making machines and gadgets it had wires and lights and things so children could make what are called electrical circuits that do something.

Both boys played with their own set and with the other one's set. Then they put all the bits from both sets together to see what else they could make.

Instead of having just a car, or just a light which switched on, they made a lorry with lights that flashed as it went along, a hooter which could be worked by pressing a button on the roof, and a bit at the back which went up and down on its own like a lift. They called their lorry “The Alard”.

It was quite amazing because they were still very young.

When the boys were a bit older they went to a school named Sydenham Junior boys' School. There was a girls' school next door but the two schools didn't have much to do with each other.

Sometimes the girls would see boys playing cricket in the yard at the boys' school and sometimes the the boys would see the girls playing netball in the yard at the girls' school, but there weren't any mixed games.

Sometimes boys would fight and if teachers saw them fighting they would write their names down and say “we will sort this out the proper way at the end of term”.

Every year just before the boys left for the summer break the teachers asked the school caretaker to put up a boxing ring in the yard. The ring was up high so all the boys standing around could see what was going on.

The head teacher got a list of all the boys who we seen fighting and told them finish their fight in the ring where everyone else could see them.

So the boy put on boxing gloves, went into the ring two at a time and the games teacher read out their names.

He would say things like “Here we have Donald Rosendale and James Ferry who were fighting because one of them thought the other one stole his magnifying glass.

They will now compete for five minutes, finish their fight properly and after today they will not fight in the yard any more”.

Then, twenty minutes later

“Here we have John Rivers and John Westbrook who were seen fighting in the yard because they both thought they were cleverer than each other.

Neither of them was clever enough to take their argument somewhere else and they were both caught breaking the school rules by fighting in the yard at lunchtime. They will now settle their differences and will not fight in the yard again”.

Some of the boys who had been in the boxing ring started their summer holidays with black eyes and bruises, which wasn't very good.

When some of the mums and dads called at the school to find out what had happened they were told that the boys were caught fighting in the yard and were told to sort it out properly in the ring where the same rules applied to both of them.

The teachers said that although it may have seemed hard at the time, most boys learned that there are proper ways to settle arguments and it was a lesson most of them remembered for the rest of their life. Usually the mums and dads agreed with the teachers.

Alan Hobbs and Bernard Schooley passed a test called the 11-Plus Exam and during the summer break they had to go to a meeting to find out what kind of school they should go to next.

The people at the meeting were special teachers and they thought Alan and Bernard should go to a technical school to learn more about engineering, science, and other important subjects.

Later that year the boys went to The Stanley Technical School, which was another all boys school. They learned how to calculate things, do experiments in laboratories, make things from wood and metal, and many other things which they found very interesting.

In one of the science laboratories was a telescope which teachers used to help explain to the boys about things in the sky like clouds and stars.

One day a bunch of boys went to the shed in the yard where some builders had left a dumper truck. The truck was like a jeep with a big scoop on the front. The engine was at the back and was started with a handle which was hooked into place swung round.

The boys crowded around so nobody could see what was happening. One of them found the starting handle, put it in place, swung it round using all his strength and the engine started. It went “chug, chug, chug”, and black smoke came out of the exhaust pipe at the top, then it got faster and the smoke cleared as the engine became warmer.

All the boys moved away and went in different directions around the yard. Some went into the school.

The teacher on duty in the playground wondered what was going on and walked toward the dumper truck, where no boys were to be seen, and wondered if it were possible for the truck to start on its own.

The caretaker arrived, stopped the engine, and took the starting handle to his room. That afternoon, some of the boys were in the chemistry lab talking about the mysterious truck incident.

The chemistry teacher, Mr Shires, said "It's not such a mystery really. I know who was there and who started the truck because I was watching through my telescope from upstairs".

He then added "There's an important lesson there. Remember, boys, if you don't want anyone to know you've done a thing, don't do it".

Nothing was done about the boy who started the truck, it was just a prank.

But in December that year something much more serious happened.

A teacher named Pete Mason was leaving the school at the end of the term. Some of the boys went to the bicycle shed, found Mr Mason's bike and put it on the roof of the shed where he couldn't reach it.

Nobody except the boys knew who did it. Mr Shires wasn't looking through his telescope that day and most of the teachers were busy somewhere else.

It got serious at lunch time.

The boys had to queue in a line outside the canteen to get their lunch and they weren't allowed in until the cook was ready and the boys were all quiet and well behaved.

One of the teachers who was on canteen duty said. "Quiet everybody! Nobody will get any lunch until those responsible for putting Mr Mason's bike on top of the shed own up and tell me who did it".

Boys tummies started rumbling. It was very cold outside and they were looking forward to a nice hot lunch with steamed pudding and custard for afters.

As they thought about the food and the waiting they got hungrier and itchier, and hungrier, and felt colder and hungrier and itchier, and colder, and hungrier, and it was horrible and getting more serious every second. What does a boy do when he's cold and hungry and itchy, and it wasn't even him who put Pete Mason's bike on top of the shed?

Then a boy named Christopher Towse said "I don't know who did it sir and some of the boys go home for lunch so they may not even be here. If a few of us volunteer to get the bike down will that be alright sir?"

The teacher had a quick word with a prefect then said "OK, who would like to volunteer?"

Seventeen hungry boys near the front of the queue put their hands up.

One of them said “If we volunteer, sir, can we get back to the front of the queue?”

“We'll see about that when you get back, off you go, and be careful”, said the teacher.

The prefect had been told to take a message to Mr Shires, who responded and watched the bicycle rescue operation through his telescope whilst the art teacher took some photographs of the boys getting the bike down from the shed roof.

The teachers at “Stanley Tech” never did find out who put the bike there but they put some of the rescue photographs in the school magazine during the next term, and sent a copy to Pete Mason at his new school.

The canteen ladies heard about the bike prank and thought they knew who put it there because of the dirty grease some of the boys had on their shirt cuffs. Boys who weren't in the rescue team!

But the canteen ladies had boys of their own and knew about pranks so they didn't tell anyone. Pete Mason was a teacher the boys liked and he knew about pranks too, so he didn't mind.

Alan and Bernard didn't only learn about school subjects at school, they learned a lot of things about people and life as well.

One day Alan did something silly. The teacher went out of the classroom for a few minutes and Alan Hobbs threw a pen at a boy named Terence Herbert.

It was an old fashioned school pen with a round wooden handle and a metal nib at one end. The nib stuck into Terence's face, just below his right eye.

It was only by good luck that it didn't go into his eye.

When the teacher came back he saw Terence was in trouble and asked what happened. A boy named Derek Maguire told him and Alan admitted he threw the pen.

The teacher, whose surname was Hibbert, took Alan Hobbs out of sight of the other boys and gave him “six of the best”. That means he hit him with a cane six times on the backside. In the 1950's teachers were allowed to do that.

Terence's face healed and most people forgot about what happened. One day Alan Hobbs made a transistor radio and took it to school to show the teachers. The radio had two long wires coming out of it. He passed one of them out through a window and connected the other one to a radiator in the English classroom.

That was before transistor radios could be bought in shops and it making it was a very clever thing to do.

The teachers were very interested, especially because Alan knew more about it than they did.

When Alan and Bernard had been at the school for about seven years they left and started work. They both went to college and studied more technical things and carried on being inventive.

**Bernard started to make hearing aids for people who were deaf or partly deaf. His inventions helped him with his own hearing problems and helped thousands of other people around the world.**

**Alan Hobbs worked with telegraph machines used to send messages and became an expert in them. He also did many other things like making lead soldiers, making flywheels for model boat engines, making better transistor radios and growing all sorts of plants in his greenhouse.**

**Later he used his skills and knowledge to make an electric stairlift to help people get up and down stairs.**

**Bernard and Alan stated friends and helped each other with their inventions.**

**From the time they put the mincing machine together at Wise Owls to the time they retired they worked very well as a team and understood each other.**

**Bernard invented some remote controllers for stairlifts so people could press a button and make the stairlift work.**

**Years later after the Internet was invented someone at “Stanley Tech” started a school web site and it had an “Old Boys” section for boys who had been to the school years before.**

**There was a message page and they found out that Terence Herbert had become ill and couldn't walk properly. They hadn't seen Terence since they all left school but they found out where he lived and went to see him.**

**Terence lived in a house with stairs and he couldn't get up the stairs properly. So Alan fitted a stairlift for him free. He said he still felt bad about throwing the pen at Terence and wanted to do something helpful.**

**After that they went to see him quite a lot and Terence played a joke. Whenever he saw them walking along the garden path he put on a motorcycle crash helmet with a visor and opened the door wearing it.**

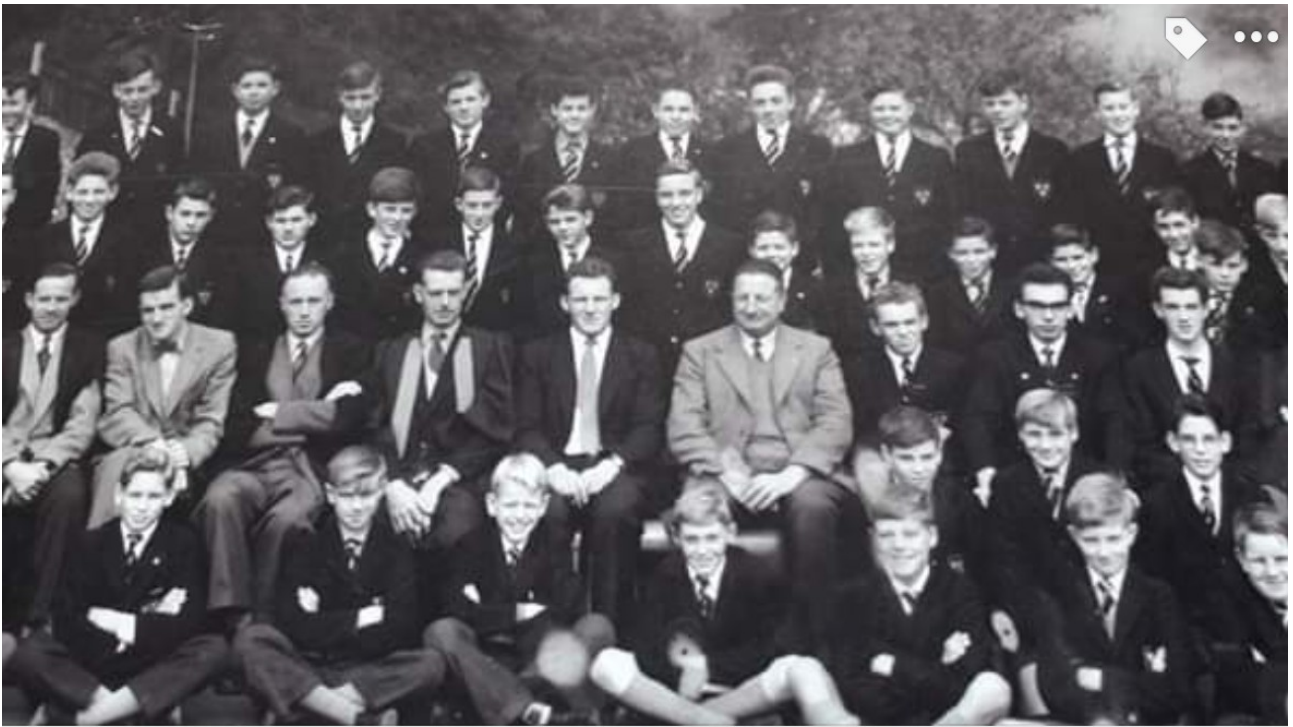
**“What's the helmet for?” asked Bernard “Is you head cold?”“No, it's for protection from flying pens!” said Terence, giving a muffled laugh from inside his headgear.**

**They asked why he had a helmet because they knew he'd never had a motor cycle and he replied that he borrowed it from Derek Maguire who lived nearby.**

**Alan and Bernard hadn't seen Derek since they left school either, but Terence said he became a newspaper reporter and went to other countries a lot. He was away at the time so they thought maybe they'd meet up with him later when he got home.**

**The techies continued to be techies and invented things for years. Most of the things they did helped other people to communicate with each other and to get around.**

**Of course, one character who is very pleased whenever another stairlift is installed is Sterlington, who brought you these stories.**



Boys and teachers at Stanley Tech in 1960

The End  
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