

## The 1930s



*Me in January 1931*

In 1931 the family sold the shop in Wilford Road and bought another fish and chip, and wet fish, shop in Wilford Crescent, Nottingham. This was a move of about a mile. This was a smaller building, and we were unable to live there as a family. My parents had arranged to buy a new house, but until it was completed, it was decided that Mum and I would lodge with Mrs Otter and family in Wilford. We were very unhappy staying there. I believe that my Dad, as did my sister Edna, slept in the new fish shop but I do not remember where Eva lived at this time.

The new house, which was being built in Wilford, was about three miles from the shop, and the other side of the River Trent. Our address would be "Wave-Crest", 12 Roland Avenue, Wilford, Nottinghamshire. It was a semi-detached house of three floors. There was no central heating, but there were open fireplaces in all the main rooms. A back-boiler gave us hot water (a back-boiler was a water heating system behind, and heated by, one of the ground floor coal fires). The lowest floor was a cellar which had a door and a small window over-looking the back

garden, which faced south, and was approximately 30 feet wide and over 100 feet long.

The ground floor had a hall, with stairs leading upwards. There was a sitting-room at the front with a bay window, a dining/living room at the back, and a kitchen with a 'walk in pantry'. Few people had a refrigerator so in the pantry was a tiled stone 'cold slab' which extended back under the stairs.

The living room had a French-door facing the garden. When we moved in, this door had to remain locked for a few months, until Dad built a wooden veranda with a stairway down to the back garden. I enjoyed looking out of the kitchen window at the garden, and the fields beyond. In the kitchen floor was a trap-door, and below it a stairway into the cellar. At the side of the house, the kitchen door opened onto two steps down to a driveway which led onto seven steps down to the garden. There was a small extension at the corner of the house which was meant to be the coal-house, but for the first six months there was just a mat on this floor, and I remember playing happily here until autumn came and the room was put to its proper use. Underneath this extension was an open store area by the cellar door. At the front of the house there was a small garden and a path leading to two steps up to a porch and our front door.

The front bedroom was big enough to take a double bed and a single bed. It had a built-in wardrobe on one side of the fireplace and space for a chest-of-draws on the other. I shared this room with Eva. There was also a small bedroom with a single bed, a Singer treadle sewing machine, a chair and a bookcase. This was Edna's room. The back bedroom was the largest and was used by my parents. I loved this room where I spent many happy hours reading, and gazing from the window. This room also became a family refuge when the floods came.

When we first moved into Wave-Crest, the fields were quite close, and when I looked from the back bedroom window I could see the farm horses which pulled the ploughs and carts. At haymaking time two or three friends and I were allowed to help with the stooks and bales. We were also able to take picnics in these fields during the summer holidays, and from there we could see a grass embankment which carried the London to Scotland railway line. We had fun collecting engine numbers and names.

Our neighbours at 14 Roland Avenue were Mr & Mrs Hutchinson. He was a railway engine driver and sometimes he would start work in the early hours of the morning. The railway company employed a man to make sure that their staff were woken on time. These men were called 'knocker-uppers' and they had a long pole to tap on bedroom windows. Sometimes the man would get the wrong house and I would be woken up instead. I then had to get out of bed, open the window and call "Not here, next door!".

At Wilford my education continued at the Wilford Endowed School. This was a church school. One of the special days each year was Foundation Day when the children would go in a 'crocodile' to St. Wilfred's Church which was about half a mile away.

The school was built about 1866, and was a tall brick building. Above the entrance was a turret-clock which struck the hours, and there was a bell which was tolled when school was about to start. I remember it as a cold building, although there was a boiler in the basement which supplied hot water to large pipes throughout the school. To sit near these pipes was a joy on a cold day, although they gave off a strong smell of hot metal.

The entrance had seven steep and well-worn stone steps to a porch entrance. I remember those stone steps because they were treacherous when they were wet or covered in snow. Many a child went home with grazed knees or hands from slipping on those steps. The entrance led to the main corridor and to two cloak-rooms which were very cold and bare. Each cloakroom had two hand basins, and four rails of coat-hooks.

On the other side of the main corridor were the classrooms. The infants and junior classes shared a very large room, which could be divided by a glazed folding screen. When the area was divided a door in the screen gave access between the rooms. When the screen was not used there were about 12 infants and about 12 juniors, so our teacher had to teach many subjects, including music, to children whose ages ranged from four to six years of age.

A door from the corridor led to a large classroom for the middle school. This room had large windows. There were two solid wood sliding doors on each side-wall which, when opened, gave a vast open area instead of a number of separate classrooms. I remember Mr (Captain) R C Davison, the Head Master, making his way from room to room when he inspected the classrooms.



*The Victorian school frontage of Wilford Endowed School.  
(See note 1 at the of this chapter)*

At the far end of the school was another large classroom with a glazed folding screen and a door. This was used for the upper age group of pupils aged 10 to 14. It was entered from the corridor. I remember Miss Statham was the teacher in charge of one of these rooms. On the other side of the folding screen the top classed were taught by Mr Davison. There was a door from this room to the boy's play area, and another door led to the Head's study.

There were no educational films or videos in those days, but we would have lantern-slides with pictures which were projected onto a white screen. These shows would often be pictures of animals or plants. If we were learning a new song, the words would be projected on the screen. I remember that I had to write out the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, which starts "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want". There are six verses in this psalm, so perhaps you can imagine the work it involved for a six year-old to do. I must have done well because it was quite often shown on the screen.

When we had reached Mr Davison's classes, woe betide you, if he thought you were not doing things right or that you were 'messaging about'. He wore a large, signet ring on his little finger and this, or his cane, could land on your head, your back or your hands.

Whilst I was there, I remember that the father of one of the boys, who had been caned, came to the school, marched through the classrooms to where Mr. Davison was sitting at his desk. He took Mr Davison's cane, hit the desk with it, and then broke it in two. He then went outside crossed the road and threw the broken cane into the River Trent!

We called Mr Davidson 'Dickie Davo' and he was commemorated in the rhyme:

*Dickie Davo is a very good man  
He goes to Church on Sunday  
To pray to God to give him strength  
To whack the kids on Monday*

Highlight of the week was when the Nottingham Library brought boxes of books to the school. We were allowed to take books home, and this is when I became aware of how interesting life could be in other parts of the world. The Children's Newspaper, edited by Arthur Mee, was also available.

The health service at the school was very good and medical inspections were held regularly. The 'nit nurse' came to the school from time to time. Eye tests were in the head's office because this room could be darkened. Medical and dental inspections were held at the church hall nearby, when a parent had to be present. As in my first school, there was milk at midmorning.

The girl's toilets were all in an open-ended brick building in the large playground. The cubicles had a shoulder high door. There were three sizes of porcelain bowls and each had two wooden slats because otherwise it would have been very cold to sit upon! The infant boys used our toilets, but from the age of six they used the other smaller building in their playground. We didn't mind going outside in the summer but oh what a different story when the winter brought frost, rain and snow!

Beyond the large playground was a large field belonging to the school where we would have 'drill' - nowadays we would say PE. If the field got too wet we had to use the playground. The field was also used for country dancing and school fetes. I used to enjoy dancing and also the times when we were asked to do displays over on the rectory lawn during church fetes. The boys never took part in the dancing, so the 'girls' wore orange ribbons, and the girls with yellow ribbons were 'boys'. I used to look forward to the church fetes because the music was played by the Nottingham City Transport Band. My Uncle Alf used to play the xylophone in the band, and I was very proud of that. His wife and daughter, Aunt Win and Eileen, usually came too so it was almost a family get-together.

Most of my time at this school was very enjoyable, with interesting things to do. I remember one time in particular, when I was in the upper class, a school friend Sheila Bailey and I were invited by Mr Davison to accompany him and Miss Doris Statham to Wollaton Park in Nottingham, we of course said "Yes!". We were to be company for Miss Statham whilst Mr Davison was taking part in a pageant depicting Wollaton Hall throughout the ages. He was dressed as a cavalier in a doublet with slashed sleeves and a Vandyke collar, calf length breeches and bucket-topped boots, a cloak and sword, and a splendid broad-brimmed hat with feathers. I remember how stunning he looked. Mr Davison drove us to Wollaton in his little car. He could not wear his hat of course, so we had to look after it for him. People who saw us drive by were amazed to see a cavalier driving a car!

Every summer the whole school would be taken by coaches to Clifton Hall for Sports Day which was followed by a tea. Sometimes we would join pupils of Clifton School, and other local schools. On the village green we would dance around the Maypole. Sometimes we would all go by coaches on a mystery picnic trip, and we had fun guessing where we would be going. We might end up in a large field near a farm, near an interesting house, or just a large field where we could play rounders or cricket. By late afternoon we would all arrive back at the school very tired, but happy, and of course very hungry.

I attended the Sunday school every Sunday morning in the local church or in the parish hall. The church was St. Wilfrid's, which was a mile from home and near the Toll Bridge. When we arrived at the church we were given biblical pictures which could be stuck into the albums we were given. The lesson was usually based on the picture of the week. At the end of each year the albums, which had our names on them, were

collected and the neatest or the fullest would receive a prize. I managed to win a couple of prizes, one prize was a framed picture of Christ standing by a doorway and holding a lamp, which I think was entitled "I am the Light of The World". A year or two later I won another prize which was a 'Silver Jubilee' shiny metal paint-box of watercolours.

On Palm Sunday each year we would be given a cross made out of a palm leaf, and we would have to process inside the church to attend a special service. Each Mothering Sunday parents would be invited to the children's service, and the children would again process inside the church and this time the children would present a posy of small flowers, maybe violets, to their mother as they passed her.

Harvest time in the church was very colourful with many flowers, leaves, fruit and vegetables. Of course the outstanding things would be sheaves of corn, and in pride of place was a large loaf of bread made in the shape of a sheaf of corn. Also at this time was the Harvest Supper when the parish hall was set out with chairs, large tables and seasonal decorations. Each table was allocated to anyone in the village who would make and supply a meat and potato pie with vegetables and gravy. A charge, two to four shillings I think, was made for each person to eat and drink. There were often ten to twelve people to a table. My mother, who was a very good cook, had a table each year. The money raised went into a fund.

On the weekend after the Harvest Supper a dance was held in the church hall when a small dance band would play. There were many types of dances including square, line and ballroom. People would come from all the districts around Wilford and would enjoy themselves until late evening. Ah, what memories I have of those dances!

November would often bring quite a lot of dense fog which we usually called a 'pea-souper'. This was caused by smoke from factory chimneys and the houses which had coal fires. This type of fog was later called smog and was grey-yellow in colour, very smelly and a danger to health.

During most winters we had snow and about Christmas time the snow would start to fall heavily when the fields, roads and rooftops would look a picture. Of course we children would enjoy the deep snow, snow-ball fights, sledging, and just walking in the snow wearing our wellingtons to go to school, the post office or the shops. If my mother needed heavy shopping from Mr Cave's farm I would go there to get vegetables and fruit and bring them home on my sledge.

During the frosty and snowy weather many children would head for the blacksmith's forge where he allowed us to roast chestnuts. Sometimes he would let me pump the bellows and on one occasion he showed me how to make iron 'S-hooks', he then let me make one by myself which turned out very well and I had it at home for a very long time. I don't remember the blacksmith's name, but his granddaughter was Daphne Snowball and about my age.

It was fascinating to watch the blacksmith remove the old horseshoes from the hooves of the working horses and prepare the hooves for the new shoes. When the new red-hot horseshoes were placed on the hooves, to check the fit, there would be a cloud of very smelly smoke. When he found the correct fit he would throw the shoe into a bucket of cold water and there would be a loud hissing and clouds of steam. When the time came to nail on the new shoes the smith would lift the horse's leg so that it rested on the leather apron he wore over his knees. He would then hammer in special nails to secure the shoes. In bad weather the blacksmith's forge was a haven for people who sometimes had to wait for up to half an hour at the nearby bus stop. The forge was at



the main crossroad in the centre of the village, and this was the route taken by the Ruddington, Clifton and Nottingham busses.

Mr Cave at the farm had two sons one of whom had a cart from which he sold fruit and vegetables. This cart had a roll-down canvas top and was pulled by a horse which I knew as Snowball. If I saw this white horse on the first of the month I was told that it would bring me good luck! In a cottage near this farm lived Mrs Winters. Many times in the summer I would go there and take a large paper carrier bag, and she would take me into her garden and fill the bag with fresh lettuce and sometimes with spring onions, radishes or beetroot. My mouth still waters at the thought of all this fresh produce, and for only tuppence (two old pennies or 2d).

In the summertime a few neighbours would make their own ice-cream in a large ice-tub while others would have a freezer and ice-cream supplied by Walls. I would often go to one of them with a pint basin and thruppence (3d) to buy ice-cream to have at home with strawberries, peaches, stewed fruit or jam.

One of my favourite places on a sunny day was 'The Brook' and the village children would spend hours there. This was Fairham Brook which is a stream feeding into the River Trent and it meanders from Clifton Lane in Wilford to Clifton Village and onwards. The water was fast flowing and very shallow so it was ideal for fishing for minnows which we caught with a piece of cotton suspended from a cork float. The fish would swallow the end of the cotton and we would net them. We would also catch them in a jam-jar baited with a bit of bread. I can still imagine I can feel the pebbles as we played barefoot in the stream, although sometimes when the water was very cold we wore wellington boots.

By crossing the Brook by a small brick bridge, or by stepping stones, the villagers could reach a grassy area with a well worn path which went all the way through Clifton Grove to the Clifton Estate. People of all ages found that this was a very good place to have picnics under the shade of the many pussy-willow trees which grew along the water's edge.

Unlike the Brook the River Trent was deep, wide and dangerous. On the main road in Wilford, on the other side from Wilford School, was a grassy bank called the Bee Bank which with its large trees helped to protect the village from flooding. However, this bank was not enough and almost every spring when heavy rain or melted snow from the Derbyshire hills combined with the tides coming up the river and the Trent would burst its banks. Dad had known of this danger when he bought our house in Wilford, but he made sure that even if the flood waters reached the level of the cellar floor there would still be at least 10ft before it reached our living quarters. When a flood was deep and Mum needed to buy food from the shops some young neighbours who had a raft were given a basket, a shopping list and money so that they could paddle to the shops and back.

In 1935 the country celebrated the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary. On May 6<sup>th</sup> Wilford School closed for the day and all the pupils were lined up in the playground and a representative of the County Council presented each of us with a Bronze Medallion. On one side of it are the profiles of the King and Queen with the dates 1910 and 1935. On the other side of the medallion are the words "Nottinghamshire County Council Education Committee" and a shield enclosing illustrations of a tree, a printing press, a coal miner's pick, shovel and lamp, and in the fourth quarter a sheaf of corn. The quarters are separated by a wavy line representing the waters of the River Trent and in the very centre of the shield is a coronet. A red, white and blue ribbon enabled the medallion to be attached to the pupil's coat.



*The mug and teaspoon from the Coronation of King George VI and the aluminium beaker from the Silver Jubilee.*



*Wilford Endowed School's anniversary procession in 1936. I'm pointed to by the arrow. (See note 1 at the of this chapter)*



*Me in my 1935 'Miss Jubilee' costume.*

One of the directors of the school, I think it was Mr Bates, presented everyone with an aluminium beaker. It was embossed with profiles of the King and Queen and engraved with the words "Silver Jubilee 1910 1935 Wilford". This presentation was followed by a party on the playing field.

The Bicentenary of the School was celebrated in 1936 by a procession of pupils through the village to the Church. A laurel wreath was carried by the Head Girl and Head Boy, and was placed by the memorial to The Reverend Benjamin Carter who was the great benefactor and had endowed the school. After the service there was tea in the Parish Hall then back to the school for sports on the playing fields.

There was another royal occasion in 1937 when Wilford School celebrated the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. All the children of the village between the ages of five and

fifteen gathered in the schoolyard and were presented with a 'Celebration Teaspoon'. The top of the spoon was decorated with a crown, a Tudor Rose and the words "1937 Coronation King George VI". Mr. Bates also gave us a white china mug decorated in gold with portraits of the King and Queen, an array of six flags and St. Edward's Crown. The mugs were then used to hold our drinks at the tea party that followed. By this date I was at West Bridgeford County Secondary School but I was pleased to be invited back for this occasion.

In the early months of 1936, when I was ten, I had been offered the chance to sit for the entrance examination for West Bridgeford County Secondary School, to enable me to further my education. The head master and head mistress of Bridgeford School came to Wilford School to give applicants some tests in reading and general knowledge. I had to go to Bridgeford School, which was two or three miles from home, for English, maths and writing tests. This lasted from 9.30 in the morning until 1 o'clock. My Mum and I went there on the bus, and during the waiting time she was able to visit friends who lived a short distance from the school. A letter arrived a few days later to inform us that I had been accepted and was to attend Bridgeford School in the following September. I was not happy about the outcome. I would have preferred to have stayed at Wilford School until I was 14 because now I had to leave my many friends behind.

I travelled to the new school by bicycle in all weathers, and I would continue to do this for the rest of my school life. At Bridgeford I had to learn to mix with people from many walks of life, and from other countries. I was expected to do hockey, tennis, swimming, gymnastics, cooking, sewing, music, art, mathematics, geography, languages, reading and writing. During the first term I had a medical and I was told that I had a curved spine, but it was hoped that remedial exercises would benefit me. I was happy to do the exercises but it meant getting to school by 8.30am.



All the pupils were expected to wear school uniforms. The boys wore black trousers and black blazers with a school badge of black and gold on the breast pocket. The girls wore black gymslips over white blouses with a black and gold tie.

My new school was not as big as I would have expected. It was a drab Victorian building with a very small play area shared by the boys and girls. There was no sports ground so for tennis and hockey we had to cycle to Lady Bay Sports Ground which was about two miles away. We had to go a similar distance into Nottingham for swimming.

Unlike Wilford School I cannot remember enough to be able to describe this school in detail, but I can remember a large hall which served for both assembly and as a gymnasium. Off this hall were a number of rooms including a chemistry room and a biology room. Cooking, sewing and domestic science were taught in a small outbuilding.

There were many changes to come at school. A quite impressive new school was built on the Loughborough Road and we moved there in September 1937. Everything was new and even the school colours were changed so our black and gold uniforms were now royal blue and yellow. No longer did the girls wear a black beret with a gold tassel they now had a blue biretta

I enjoyed being in the new building and it was much better having cloakrooms, with one for wet clothes and wellingtons, which was a boon after cycling two miles in the rain or snow! There was a gymnasium with a shower room, and this was the first school I had attended which had indoor toilets! In the dinning room the long tables were laid with cutlery and with drinking water. Food was served from the school kitchen, but it was expensive and so I continued to take a packed lunch. The school was surrounded by fields and we had provision for rugby, hockey, tennis and athletics.

It seemed perfect, but not for me, and by July 1939 I had become unwell and I was not coping with school work. At this stage Mum and Dad decided that I could not continue with my studies. Dad said he would arrange for me to leave school providing I went to evening classes. Dad had to repay some of the grant I had received but he never complained.



*Mum, Margaret Lill,  
me and Dad in  
Blackpool, c1936.*

Before this event the life for me in the 1930s had been happy and comfortable, but for many grown-ups life could be a struggle. This was a period of high unemployment and low wages. To earn a little more money many women did 'out work'. One such was Mum's youngest sister my Aunt Eva. I remember that when she visited us in Wilford she had walked all the way from Forest Road, Nottingham. In the pram she pushed was her son, my cousin, Stephen and also in the pram there were a lot of small components from an engineering works. She spent every available moment working on these parts, and was paid 'piece work'.



*Mum and Dad at the rear of their house at 12 Roland Avenue, c1939.*

In the mid 1930s, Mum and Dad were not finding life as easy because soon after moving to Wilford Dad had made a bad investment in a scheme which failed. I think he was the victim of a con man. The income from the fish shop was not covering its costs and so was closed. Dad got a job with Star Stores, a Nottingham firm where they sold goods on credit. Dad had to make deliveries on his bicycle and this was not easy when he had items that were bulky, like bedding, or fragile like tea services. The long distances he walked and cycled in all weathers were too much for him.

On doctor's advice Dad had to find lighter work. He was lucky that Mr Lill, a neighbour, told him that there was a vacancy at the Nottingham Co-Operative Society for a collector of cash which was being paid every week for goods that had been supplied on credit. His application was accepted and now his journeys were shorter and many of his calls were door-to-door.

He would enter the payments into a big ledger and I was able to assist him by counting the money to balance the accounts, which earned me some pocket money.

Mum worked hard housekeeping and cooking but she was far from fit. She probably had a heart condition and certainly had bronchitis during the winter months. Coughs and colds seemed to have been worse for everyone in those days.

In 1939 we celebrated two weddings in our family. On Whit Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> of May my sister Eva was married at St. Wilfreds Church in Wilford to Leonard Stones. Eva and Leonard were both librarians at branches of the Nottingham Public Library. On her wedding day Eva wore a green dress. My elder sister Edna was the bridesmaid and she had a pink dress. Eva and Edna had brown hats, gloves and shoes. Leonard's best man was Lesley who was a long time friend from schooldays.

The second wedding was on Christmas Day 25<sup>th</sup> December 1939 and also at St. Wilfreds Church. Edna married John Lewis who was always known as Jack. They were both members of Nottingham Chapels. Jack's brother-in-law was the best man and there were two bridesmaids, me and Jack's youngest sister who was married to the best man. Edna wore a flowered dress, silver shoes, a short veil held by a silver

head-dress and carried golden chrysanthemums. We bridesmaids had lavender dresses and carried matching muffs with a silver spray of leaves, a silver spray headband and silver shoes. My strongest memory of that day was the extreme cold and my dress was no match for the icy wind!

When I ended my schooldays I wanted to go into office work and so Dad took me to the offices of Nottingham Co-operative Society to see if they had a vacancy in any of their departments. I needed to pass tests of my skills in writing, maths and to show that I could handle cash. I passed, but I was told there would be no vacancies until the end of December.

In the last years of the 1930s people talked of war and in 1939 men were being conscripted. We had all been given a gas mask in a cardboard box which most people covered with a waterproof fabric. We learned about air-raid precautions and air-raid shelters were being built.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 Britain declared war on Germany. Dad became an air-raid warden and although I was not officially a member I was issued with a steel helmet. Sometimes the air-raid siren would go, but no bombs would fall so everyone called this the 'Phoney War'.

Since I was no longer at school and with no work yet, I went with Mum on the 5<sup>th</sup> September to the National Laundry near the toll bridge on Wilford Road. We had gone there to get some of Dad's stiff collars cleaned and starched. While Mum was dealing with that I asked the young lady in the shop if there were any vacancies for an office junior and she directed me to a door with a window. When I rang the bell the window slid down and to my surprise it had been opened by Mavis Sheffield who had been at Wilford School with me. Mavis introduced me to Mrs Cartwright, the head clerk who lived in Wilford, and she told me I could start the next day.



*Eva and Leonard's wedding in May 1939. From the left: Alice Stones (Leonard's mother), George Briggs, Leonard Stones, Eva (my sister), Herbert Stones (Leonard's father) and Elsie Briggs. This photo was taken at the rear of our house and shows the balcony.*





*Edna and Jack's wedding at Christmas 1939. From the left: George and Elsie Briggs, Jack's sister, John Charles Lewis (Jack), Edna (my sister), me, Kathleen Lewis (Jack's mother) and the best man Sam who was married to Jack's sister.*

So on the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1939, at the age of fourteen, I began my working life. I started to learn all about the cleaning services the laundry gave. My first job was to collect the time cards from the clocking-in machine and take them to the office where I checked them. I also did all the routine tasks like ensuring that all the women who did the marking on the clothes had enough ink, but not too much to avoid spills! The boss was Mr Henry Redgate who lived in Wilford. His two middle aged sons helped him run the company. They took care of the health of the staff to the extent of giving hot milk and biscuits to everyone each morning. This might have been to counter the possible ill effect of the cleaning chemicals and of the damp atmosphere.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> September all householders had to fill in a form to give particulars of everyone in their house and the next day we all had to collect our Identity Cards at the Parish Hall. My identity number was *RNST411/4*.

In December the application I had made at the Co-op brought an offer of a position in the offices of the Nottingham Co-operative Wholesale Society Bakery. I had been happy working at the laundry but this new job would give me more varied work and progress would be faster.

I had seen many changes in the 1930s but it now looked as if those would be small compared with the 1940s.



Note 1.

The photographs of Wilford Endowed School and the Bicentennial procession are taken from the school's book: Wilford School Through 250 Years, 1986, E M Wilson, ISBN 0 09510989 0 X.

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