

# A Cricket Man



The Life and Love of  
**STEVE  
PERRYMAN**

With Brian Halford

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## Chapter 1

### Carol

THIS BOOK is written as a thank you from me to all the fantastic people (and there are so many) that I have met during my life and, in particular, during my life in cricket. I have been privileged to play and work with and encounter so many amazing people and I thank each and every one of you. But above all this book is a heartfelt thank you to one very special person, my wonderful late wife Carol.

Carol was a diamond. She was my rock. Brummie-born and bred, she was my driving force for 28 years. She passed away in 2018 and I still miss her every day.

She was just brilliant – a lovely person who wanted everybody around her to be happy and make the most of themselves. I was incredibly lucky to have her in my corner. She was a constant force for good – always looking for the best way forward, always on the lookout to make other people's lives that little bit better.

One example: I was 38 and, having retired as a cricketer, was at a bit of a crossroads and casting around for what to do next. We hadn't been going out long, but she knew about my coaching aspirations and said: 'You're going to have to learn to drive.' I had always got by without driving and was used to catching buses and trains (in the early days I even used to get the bus to Edgbaston when I was playing for Warwickshire's first team.) and getting lifts off mates. But Carol knew that if I could drive it would massively help my coaching career prospects, so she kicked me into action.

I did what I was told ... Carol had a way of very nicely making people do what they were told!

She had a blue Cavalier that she adored. It was broken into about six times by the good denizens of Birmingham, but it always bounced back. It was ultra-resilient, just like its owner. When I started learning to drive, Carol would take me out in it in the evenings after I'd finished coaching and often our test track was the main car park at Edgbaston. There were hardly any cars there about half past nine at night, so I'd drive round and round in an oval like a race-track. Rob Franklin from the groundstaff lived in the club flat overlooking the car park at the time and one morning he came over to me and said: 'Was that you driving round the car park last night? It's like living in a \*\*\*\*\*g lighthouse with your headlight beams coming through the window every 30 seconds.'

All the practice on the Edgbaston skid pan paid off ... in 1993 I passed my driving test first time. In 1995, I joined Warwickshire as youth team coach and suddenly was travelling the country. There were no team-mates to cadge a lift off and it would have been impossible without a driving licence. My coaching career and all that flowed from it would never have begun. Carol was the catalyst.

Her influence opened that door for me. That's just one example of so many. She was pure gold and I owe all of what I achieved in cricket, and particularly in coaching, to her.

So this book is a huge thank you with all my love to Carol but it is also a thank you to everyone who helped a boy from the backstreets of Birmingham to fulfil his dream of a life in cricket. I have been so lucky to be so supported all the way through. By mum and dad, who spent so much time and what little money they had on helping me chase my cricket dream. By my brother Jon, who took me up to the park in Reddings Lane and welcomed me into games with his mates. And by my sister Mary, who first wrote to Warwickshire to arrange a trial for me. They laid me the platform to build on and then I continued to be so lucky and play and work with legends like Alan Oakman, Neal Abberley, Bob Woolmer and John Inverarity, who helped shape me as a coach.

The little lad who pretended to be a professional cricketer in the back alley at Yardley turned out to be a professional

cricketer for real and share a dressing room with the best in the world. In that alleyway, in my dreams I dismissed the world's top batsmen. Then it turned out that I dismissed plenty of them in real life: Geoff Boycott, Barry Richards, Viv Richards, Ian Botham. It can happen.

For any youngster who reads this and is dreaming of a career in cricket, the message from my story is clear: go for it! Work hard, listen to advice (always listen to it, then weigh it up and decide whether it's good enough advice to take.), do the right things and be lucky and it could all happen for you as well.

Above all, be lucky. In sport and in life, that's the best thing to be. And how lucky was I to have Carol?

## Chapter 2

### ‘When I grow up ...’

ON 16 June 1964, a sunny Tuesday morning in Birmingham, the boys and girls of Class Five at Greet Primary School in Tysesley were given a project. Dorothea Reynolds, a much-loved and highly respected teacher, supplied her flock of eight-year-olds with the title, ‘When I grow up ...’ and told them to take it from there.

I was a member of that class. I sat down, took up my fountain pen, dipped it in the inkwell in the corner of the old wooden desk and, without hesitation, wrote: ‘When I grow up, I am going to be a cricket man.’ I didn’t seem to be in any doubt about it.

I still have that piece of paper. And I’m very happy to say that a cricket man is exactly what I turned out to be.

I wonder how many other members of that class back in 1964 were lucky enough to fulfil the dream they outlined that day. I would like to think they all did because Greet was such a fantastic school and I loved every minute of it. But I



can vouch for the fact that at least one child sitting there at his desk describing his dream went on to live it.

Well, most of it anyway. Having established in the first line that I was going to be ‘a cricket man’, I went on to assert, in the fetching green ink that anyone who went to school in that era will recall, that, ‘I am going to play for England in the Test matches against Australia.’

Well, I never quite managed that, though I did play against the Aussies for Warwickshire and had the joy of facing the great Jeff Thomson in full throttle. I have been lucky enough to be a cricket man – involved in the great game as player and coach – all my adult life.

International cricket eluded me, though I was tipped for it early on in some quarters, and certainly not everything went to plan. As is the case with anyone who has a long career in professional sport, you can always look back and think things might have been different here and could have been better there. But I think that mop-topped lad in the grey V-necked pullover and short trousers in Class Five would have been pretty happy if he had known what was coming: five decades in cricket as player and coach; a fair bit of success in both roles; a load of laughs along the way; playing with and against some great cricketers; meeting some fantastic people. I am very proud – and very lucky – to have turned out to be ‘a cricket man’.

Back to the summer of 1964. On the day I tackled that project (almost a whole sheet of paper in fountain pen without a single crossing out or blot, by the way – not bad for an eight-year-old!), England’s cricket team was in Nottingham preparing for the second Ashes Test of the summer against Australia at Trent Bridge. I was clearly monitoring the series carefully. ‘Ted Dexter is the captain of England and Bobby [sic] Simpson is the captain of Australia,’ I wrote. ‘England and Australia have just had a Test match and it was a drawn match. On Thursday there will be another Test match. I watch the Test match as soon as I get home.’

In those days, of course, cricket-mad boys and girls could watch Tests live and free on the BBC. Two days later, I raced home up the hill from Greet to our house in Reddings Lane to put the telly on at lunchtime and cheer on an England team of Ted Dexter, John Edrich, Colin Cowdrey, Ken Barrington, Peter Parfitt, Phil Sharpe, Jim Parks, Fred Titmus, Fred Trueman, Len Coldwell and, making his debut, Norman Gifford.

If somebody had told me, a cricket-bonkers eight-year-old, back then that I would one day play against five of that team – Edrich, Cowdrey, Sharpe, Titmus and Gifford – in county cricket I think I would have exploded with joy.

Not playing in that Test match but recalled for the following one at Old Trafford was Geoffrey Boycott. I was

to play against Geoffrey on many occasions and enjoy quite a bit of success against him. I wouldn't exactly say Geoff was my rabbit, but, well ... more of that later.

I did go on to play for England at under-19s level. I won my county cap for Warwickshire (now that really was living the dream!) and I was to enjoy ten years as a professional cricketer with Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Then I embarked upon a coaching career which has given me just as much satisfaction and possibly more. I was Warwickshire's bowling coach when they won the County Championship in 2004, a triumph that nobody saw coming, and I have been privileged to work with some of the greatest cricketers in the world, like Dale Steyn, Shaun Pollock and Heath Streak and some of the nicest guys, like Vasbert Drakes, Jim Troughton and Chris Woakes.

Of course, there are a few 'what-ifs'. In my early days as a seam bowler at Warwickshire I was hotly tipped as a potential star of the future. In the spring of 1976, one national newspaper picked me out as one of their '76 to watch in 1976' (see what they did there?). Among those alongside me on the page were athlete Steve Ovett (later an Olympic gold medallist), jockey John Reid (who went on to ride 1,937 winners) and footballer Kevin Reeves (who was to join Manchester City for £1.25m – the equivalent of about £30m today) so the paper's judgement wasn't too bad.

I didn't become a star but am very comfortable with that. I never set out to be one. All I wanted to do was play cricket to as high a standard as I possibly could. Looking back, I did okay. Everyone wants to be the best they can be, of course, and so it was disappointing that my career did not evolve the way I had hoped and the way some people predicted it would. My star was ascending for a while but then lost momentum and came crashing down for reasons I will go into in the pages that follow. It was a very difficult period and, for a sportsman who was still relatively young, really hard to take at the time. These days, professional cricketers have so much support around them to guide them through the bad patches. It was very different back then. You had to try to work a lot of things out yourself and you didn't have the experience or knowledge to do so. How could you? It was tough.

But even then, as I struggled with my bowling and my playing career hit a brick wall, there turned out to be a big positive from it for the long term. What I went through as a player, especially when it all started to fall apart, was to help me hugely in my career as a bowling coach later on, because I had experienced many of the problems that can affect bowlers. I understood those problems and was well placed to help players deal with and overcome those challenges.

Anyone who is privileged enough to spend the best part of 50 years connected to professional sport, as I have been,

will have known some bad days and some difficult times. But for me even the bad times had a real silver lining and I have been blessed with many more great times than bad ones. That working-class lad from Birmingham did okay.