

Reading  
Between  
the Lines

The Biography of  
*'Cockney'*

# Cliff Lines

70 YEARS  
in horseracing



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**RACING POST**

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## THE EARLY YEARS

CLIFFORD VICTOR Lines was born on 14 February 1935, an improbable date for someone with not one romantic bone in their body! However, the location was more auspicious: the barracks of the Scots Greys in Edinburgh with whom his father was serving at the time. Cliff's first memory is aged about three, being sat astride one of the stunning grey horses by his father and screaming when he was taken off! It seems his life path was set early on. Unfortunately, Cliff's early equine education came to an abrupt end when, shortly after Cliff's first experience on horseback, his father, Bill, transferred to the RAF. The family had moved through several army placements including at Wilmslow and Aldershot before settling in Feltham, south-west London, where his father was squadron leader and it was here that Cliff grew up. It was not an unusual childhood and included, as childhood often did at that time, a stint with the Boys Brigade, some scrumping and a collection of birds' eggs.

There were six children. Cliff's eldest brother, Billy, a butcher by trade and a good dancer by choice, sadly was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in his early thirties. Billy lived until he was 60, when his wife temporarily put him into a care home so she could have a week's respite. Regrettably, Billy picked up an infection while there. Cliff and his brothers went to visit him and Cliff remembers looking back as they were leaving and seeing tears in Billy's eyes. They knew they wouldn't see each other again.

Dave was the second eldest and now lives in Newmarket with his wife Rene. Dave was a child actor. One afternoon, Cliff and Dave went to the cinema in Hounslow to see one of the films Dave was

in called *Trouble In The Air*. The boy Dave was playing went into a shop with a mate; as they were leaving, Dave's character asked the shopkeeper whether he had any broken biscuits to which he replied in the affirmative. Dave's character then replied, 'Well, mend them then!' Cliff and Dave burst out laughing and were told to shut up by the man in the row in front of them. Unfortunately, neither of them has improved their sense of humour since! As an adult, Dave initially went into the Navy before becoming a rep for Castrol and eventually he moved to Newmarket, where he went to work for Jeremy Hindley, a Newmarket trainer, as his maintenance man and driver.

The third child, another boy, was Eric, who became a welder. Eric had a canary who would sit on his shoulder and they would exchange kisses. Sadly, this caused Eric to get psittacosis and both his kidneys collapsed. He was on dialysis for ten years until his death.

Cliff was the fourth and, thankfully, the last boy! The next two children were both girls, Muriel who eventually followed Cliff to Newmarket with her husband Malcolm, and finally Irene who lives in Crawley.

All four boys were in the Boys Brigade and Cliff remembers following along at the back of the parade, pretending to blow his bugle but not having any idea how to actually play it! What he really enjoyed, however, was the annual camping trip. In fact, he loved camping so much that after the Boys Brigade camp he switched to the Scouts so he could go on their camping trip. Then the next one up was the Life Buoy (Sea Cadets) camping holiday. Then back to the Boys Brigade in time for their next trip!

Cliff's love of nature was apparent early. A neighbour taught him how to blow eggs and Cliff gradually built up one of the best collections among his mates; he was happy to scramble up trees, carefully inserting his hand into a nest and removing a single egg to take home, blowing the contents and adding the empty shell, fully labelled with species, date and place of gathering, to his collection. The same neighbour also took Cliff to St James' Park, London, where they found two featherless pigeon squabs. The neighbour was going to raise both, but, that night, one was killed by the cat, so the survivor was given to Cliff to raise, which he did

successfully. The pigeon would sit on his shoulder, parrot-fashion, and would accompany Cliff to wherever he might be going. One day, Cliff and a friend were bird nesting on a railway bank and saw something blue covered in leaves and branches. They found a stick and poked it to ensure it wasn't a butterfly bomb (German SD 2 anti-personnel bombs dropped by the Luftwaffe during World War Two). Once they had confirmed it wasn't going to explode, they pulled it out and found it was a bag full of new shirts. They climbed back on to the bicycle, Cliff sitting across the handlebars with the bag on his lap and, as they were crossing the bridge over the railway, they saw a police car coming towards them. They showed the police what they had found and the police scrambled down the bank, rather less adeptly than the boys, and found two more bags, both containing leather jackets. The boys were disappointed that they never heard anything more about their discovery.

Cliff's next avian venture was pigeon racing: he built his own loft and got himself ten or so pigeons to race. The first pigeon successfully completed initial race and Cliff was hooked. Unfortunately, when the next race came around, Cliff's father was home on leave and they went to visit Cliff's uncle, so he was unable to race the pigeon. The next start was, therefore, a significant increase in distance for the bird; it was loaded on to a lorry and off they went. The next day at school, he was caught staring out of the window by a teacher. 'Lines! What are you looking at?' he was sharply reprimanded. 'Please sir, I am waiting for my racing pigeon to come home – he was released yesterday and it's his longest flight yet!' Cliff had discovered he could see his pigeon loft from the classroom window! Sadly, the further distance was too much and the pigeon never returned home. That was the end of the pigeon racing!

His love of lessons was less apparent than his love of nature. This was in the days where small, cheeky boys were still caned at school. Cliff occasionally had the cane across his hand from his class teacher; however, he soon discovered that if he got sent to the headmaster, rather than knock on the door and take the beating, he could rub his hand against the corner of the wall and the door coving and it would come up with a couple of red weal marks. On returning to the classroom, he would be asked to show his hand to the master and there were the 'cane'

marks so he got off scot-free! Cliff remembers two school trips: a history outing to Hampton Court Palace was not his cup of tea; he hid behind curtains during the tour, but his toes stuck out, so he was spotted by the teacher and got into trouble. The second trip was when he was about 12 and they had a school outing to the abattoir. The reason this trip has stuck in his mind is that they were all given ice-creams after the tour! He particularly remembers one of his last teachers, Charlie Hawkes, who was the sports master. He was always kind to Cliff although Cliff was no good at sports: when they ran around the football pitch, Cliff always lagged behind; he was so small that his little legs just couldn't keep up with the others! However, his gymnastic skills were better thanks to his natural balance which was to stand him in good stead when he started riding later on. Yet, strangely, Cliff struggled on a family outing to Richmond ice-rink, spending most of the time on his backside while his older brother, Dave, literally skated rings around him. However, his exceptional balance, along with his core strength from riding, came into its own many years later when, in his fifties and visiting his children in Australia, he had an opportunity to try water-skiing for the first time. He proudly recalls standing up on his very first run, having stayed in the crouch slightly longer than a professional would, before completing the full circuit of the lake without falling. He can also do a yoga position called 'crow' which he is very pleased about, although it is the only yoga he knows! And don't challenge him to a push-up match – he still retains that natural core strength.

Cliff's father, Bill, had a yellow Labrador, but the dog lived away with Bill at the RAF barracks and Cliff only saw it when his dad came home on leave. It is a moot point whether Cliff was more excited to see the dog or the sweets his father always brought home with him. His father definitely came a poor third! Aged nine, while living in Feltham, Middlesex, Cliff persuaded his mother to allow him to have a puppy which he bought himself for £1. The collie-cross pup was the offspring of one of his school friend's dogs: he named the pup Laddie and trained him himself. Cliff claims Laddie was very well trained, but there is little evidence as to whether or not this might be true. The family certainly differ in their memories of his behaviour!



When he was about ten, Cliff swam across the River Thames at Runnymede for a dare. He made it across, but then realised he had no way back to the other bank where his friends were waiting for him. The only option was to swim for it! Cliff was exhausted from the first swim; he wasn't a strong swimmer and could only do doggy paddle. He was halfway back when a large paddle steamer full of tourists appeared. Cliff was terrified – there was no way they would see him in the murky water. Luckily, he had just made it safely to the far bank when the steamer drew level. Water, in all its states, seems to have had a beguilement for Cliff: a couple of years later, he was out with his brother, Eric, and some mates and they noticed the gravel pits had frozen over, so they decided to take a short cut across them. All eight walked together in a group rather than spreading out. Cliff can still hear the snaps and groans of the ice barely taking their weight to this day. Water was not the only element to catch Cliff's attention. Fire was fascinating, and so was what would burn. One day he decided to check whether one of Irene's dolls would melt or catch fire, so he tossed the doll into the open fire: she vanished in a puff of smoke! Cliff rushed outside in the hope of seeing the doll appear from the top of the chimney and the commotion brought Irene into the room at the critical moment, but there was nothing left to rescue. No one can remember what she was made of to vanish so completely, but, thankfully, Irene has now just about forgiven Cliff and his incendiary activities are now limited to the wood burner and the occasional bonfire under strict supervision!

Cliff always liked to use his initiative. He made his pocket money by collecting discarded lemonade bottles and returning them to the local shop. He got paid 2d per bottle. He told the neighbours from whom he collected them that the money was for the Scouts, although they never saw any of it. Eventually, he was returning so many bottles that the shopkeeper became suspicious and accused him of taking bottles from the back of the shop, bringing them round to the front and claiming the tuppence again!

There was no family connection with racing until one of his schoolmates (Tony Trevor, still a good friend despite moving to America to pursue a career in pharmacology) remarked, 'You're small: you should

be a jockey.' At the time, Tony's mother was working in the local Job's Dairy where one of her colleagues was a warned-off jockey (known to Cliff as Mr Garnett). He kindly wrote off to various trainers to find a job for the young Lines. Cliff's only racing experience was a visit to Ascot with his father when he was ten years old. He was dumped at the top of the stands and told to stay there, which he did, until his father collected him at the end of the day. Cliff had only ridden once, a gypsy cob belonging to a friend. Cliff turned up for the promised ride after school one day and they set off, only to be stopped by a little girl on the leading rein without a saddle. Cliff was made to hand the saddle over and finish his ride bareback. They were out for nearly two hours. Unfortunately, the leading rein pony was in season and Cliff was on a colt: it was a very uncomfortable and painful experience! At the end of the two-hour ride, both ponies were turned back out into the field together and Cliff had his first sex education lesson!

Meanwhile, Cliff's elder brother David had already joined Ealing Studios and become a successful young actor, his more memorable roles including the son of Googie Withers and John McCallum in *It Always Rains on Sunday* and the telegraph boy in *Scott of the Antarctic*. However, Cliff had no interest in bright lights and greasepaint and was duly packed off by his parents to join Noel Murless who had replied to Mr Garnett offering the young Lines an apprenticeship. Cliff started the day after leaving school, the first Lines child to fly the nest.