



MR MCKENZIE'S WONDERFUL WORLD by Tony Edens.

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]

Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this autobiographical story, which is called 'Mr McKenzie's Wonderful World' by Tony Edens.

Mr McKenzie's Wonderful World by Tony Edens.

From as far back as I can remember, Auntie Eva lived with us. She was my mother's sister, an extrovert, always making a lot of noise and fuss in everything she did. One day, when I was about five, Auntie Eva took me to her workplace. She worked at Oxford GWR railway station. Her office, which was on the up-side platform, was dark and windowless. She only seemed to emerge when a train was due.

The station was built mainly of wood, painted cream and light brown. It was very dull on the street side, whereas the LMS station next to it looked far more elegant. But exteriors can be misleading. The GWR station was busier, with trains coming from Birmingham and then south to Didcot Junction, Reading and London. The LMS station was a mere dead end. The GWR station was always bustling with activity and interest. At least that's how it seemed to me.

On the first visit I noticed the gas lamps. It was a fine sunny day, and I would have been taken home long before the lamps were lit. I think it must have been the beginning or end of the university term because the students' luggage - an amazing variety of trunks - was piled high. There were also pigeons in baskets, peering out through wicker bars.

When a train was due, I stood, my hand clasped in Auntie Eva's, looking north. The train was almost at the platform before I caught sight of it. Then, with a fearful rumbling, it came alongside us. Even more frightening was the heat emanating from it as it swept by. Once it stood still, the engine was less fearsome. Then it was tended by its keepers almost as if it were a living creature. A brave man had to clamber down on to the railway line between the engine and carriages to unhitch the engine, which then ambled a few yards to the water tower to be given a drink.

In the afternoon, we walked across the railway lines, then over the bridge to the South Signal Box where Mr McKenzie operated all the levers. 'Here you are,' said Mr McKenzie at one point. 'You can pull this one.' But the lever was so big and I was so small. It couldn't be done. 'I'll help you,' said Mr McKenzie. He drew the lever across, with me pulling also. But I knew that it was he and not I who had moved it and wished that I were big and strong like him.

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At the end of the day, the pigeons were released from their baskets on the platform into the blue sky, and we went home.

As I grew older, I longed to work in Mr McKenzie's wonderful world full of levers, with its vantage point high above any danger. But I never did. The station I knew then has long since been replaced by a modern one. Mr McKenzie's signal box has also gone. A bare patch of ground remains where it once stood.