



A Cock-Eyed Optimist: An intimate memoir of a gay film fan born in 1939 in South London (The Memoirs of Nigel Quiney)

Nigel Quiney

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This unusually frank and honest memoir deals with the life of Nigel Quiney from his earliest memories of living through the blitz of London in WWII, to when he was twenty-one and boarded the Queen Elizabeth believing he was emigrating to the USA. His experiences there and travelling coast-to-coast are a fascinating read as he details how a young Englishman saw this country in 1960. In this book he details how he realised that he was gay at a very early age in London and how he came to terms with it, at the same time discovering what was then the underworld of London's gay life.

A fascinating read for anyone interested in this period of war and the difficult after-years for a young man knowing that he was different and ultimately discovering his gayness when the very mention of the subject was taboo, but acting upon it.

This is the first of four memoirs.

About the Author

Born 1939 in West Dulwich, in South London to a middle-class family and growing up in the Blitz left many vivid memories to a very young child. He attended Oakfield, a local private kindergarten, as bombs dropped and at the age of six was evacuated to Eccles Hall in Norfolk. There he experienced great loneliness and the hideous attentions of the matron as well as kindness of the US airmen stationed at Snetterton. Back in South London to a new house in Streatham, he returned to Oakfield school. He enjoyed his stay, eventually passing the eleven-plus and gaining a scholarship to Dulwich College a public school.

All his Easter and summer holidays were spent at the family's holiday home in East Dean, near Eastbourne in E.Sussex. There he formed an immensely close relationship with a boy of his own age and together, they explored the Downs and the local Birling Gap beach. He began to realise that he was different. By the age of thirteen, due to the publicity which surrounded the jailing of Lord Montague, he had worked out that he was homosexual. He began to hate college but discovered the wonderful world of Hollywood movies where he also discovered an expression for his sexuality. He was persuaded to join the Boy-Scouts and later the army corps which he loathed. His family were completely unaware of his being gay as in those days the very subject was taboo and indeed did not cross his parent's minds in relation to their off-spring.

In 1955, he was taken on a European tour by car with his family, visiting war-torn France and Italy. A year later he joined his father's paper merchant business at their offices in the city where bomb sites proliferated. In working after-hours in a coffee bar to tire and rid himself of sexual urges, he jumped out of the frying pan into the fire when he discovered that other workers there were gay. He was seduced accordingly and was introduced into the labyrinth of underground gay bars and clubs. Through many experiences he made good friends. He avoided National Service by confronting his medical team with the admission that he was gay,

much to their fury. He discovered a family living in Paris with a holiday home in Cap d'Antibes where for five years he spent his summer holidays. From his experiences in the South of France he began to design silk head-scarves which he had hand-painted in Paris and sold to the expensive London department stores. At nineteen he fell in love with a Jamaican man and entered a different world of men who desired black men and vice-versa. When he was twenty-one, his mother discovered that he was gay and ultimately accepted the situation before he sailed on the Queen Elizabeth to the USA. There he toured and had many exciting adventures and encounters.

His tour ended in Mexico, before he flew back to London.

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