

## RUSTY NAIL AND BEDBUG

There were four of them, two boys and two girls, ten years old and in the same class at school. And they were bullied. It was not surprising, therefore, that they came together for mutual protection. The surprise was that the source of the persecution was their unusual names - or more accurately, their nicknames. The bullying was not physical - there were no cuts and bruises, no blood nor broken bones - just teasing. But oppression in any form is no laughing matter, as any victim will testify. Thus was born the BNB - not Bed an' Breakfast - but the Bad Name Band.

For years they had suffered at the hands of the schoolyard wits. Take little Jackie Nail. He had once basked in the reflected glory of a distant cousin who had starred in the TV series *Arrivederci Henny* and had had a pop hit with *Alligator Boots*. And all might have gone well for him but for his flaming red mop. Unfortunately the jibe went round that he once had had ordinary brown hair but his mother had left him out in the rain one night and it had gone rusty. It was only a short step to Rusty Nail.

Rusty's pal rejoiced in the moniker of Bedford Buggins. There was little that could be done about the surname. But his parents need not have burdened him with Bedford just because they had spent the first night of their honeymoon in a campervan in the bewitching midland town also of that name. Again, it did not take the playground long to give him the hurtful handle of Bedbug.

The mutation of the boys' names, however, was simple in comparison with the girls'. Little Mary Malone had a fanatical love for the musical, *My Fair Lady* and *All I Want Is a Room Somewhere* was her favourite song. She sang the words, *Oh Wouldn't it Be Lovely* so often that they became an extension of her normal speech. Morning, noon and night she could be heard saying, *Wouldn't it this and wouldn't it that - wouldn't it, wouldn't it, wouldn't it*. So you can see that it wasn't because she had mahogany nipples that her class mates called her *Wooden Tit*.

The other lass had been unfortunate in the choice of family into which she decided to be born. The innocuous surname Smith, however, belied the idiosyncratic ways of her parents. Fundamental Christians, they believed that every word in the Bible was sacrosanct. Her mother was not too bright and believed divine guidance could be had by opening the Holy Book at random and putting her finger on a particular verse. There was a tale in the village that one day she came up with the line: *He went and hanged himself*. As this gave her no satisfaction she tried again and found herself being advised, *Go and do thou likewise*. It wasn't her day so she quit while she was behind. Nevertheless she had still used this holy bran-tub method for finding names for her four sons. Joseph and James were the fortunate ones. Nebuchadnezzar was not quite so lucky. But we must really commiserate with poor little Shittim! When a baby girl was born, the mother produced the name Pslamci. Alas, some dozy pastor had baptised her before it was discovered that the name she had chosen was Psalm One Hundred and One! At school the poor girl was saddled with Pizzlam.

So there we have it: Rusty Nail and Bedbug, Pizzlam and Wooden Tit. And this is the tale of how they proved in the face of adversity that Unity is Strength and how they had the last laugh on their persecutors.

Bryan Harbottle