THE LITTLE THINGS THAT STICK.

by

CRAIG ATHERTON

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THE TURNPIKE CENTRE INSTALLATION

The Turnpike Gallery, in collaboration with Leigh Library and with funding from the Local Growth and Place Flexible Grant (LGPFG), is delighted to present a vibrant new installation by local artist Craig Atherton. Unveiled September 2025, the installation features 36 original window vinyl artworks specially created for the Turnpike Centre. The works draw inspiration from Wigan Council's Drumcroon Art Collection – a much-loved resource for local schools – and from the artists own memories of visiting the former Drumcroon Centre as a schoolboy.

For this project, he began with the work of Patrick Heron from the collection as his starting point. Discovering that Heron often painted from memory, this connected deeply with the artist's bold use of colour and shape, recognising parallels with his own practice. He decided to explore his personal memories of The Turnpike, Leigh, the surrounding towns, and his own childhood. In a break from his usual carefully planned process, he started by etching spontaneous line drawings to capture the rawness of those recollections. He then moved into monoprinting, embracing speed, shape, and experimentation without overthinking. The resulting 36 artworks each represent a distinct memory – from afternoons with his grandmother, to adventures playing in nearby streets, to moments experienced in and around the Turnpike itself. Together, they form a joyful and visually striking celebration of personal history and shared community life, expressed through bold colours and playful forms.

FOREWORD

The Little Things That Stick is an extraordinary new commission by local artist and printmaker Craig Atherton, whose practice we at The Turnpike Gallery have had the privilege to see flourish in recent years. It is a pleasure to now see him step forward as a commissioned artist, creating work on a significant public scale.

This striking window installation reflects the growing confidence of his evolving practice. Drawing inspiration from the Drumcroon Art Collection, a cornerstone of Wigan's cultural heritage, Craig has produced a body of work that is both deeply personal and universally resonant. His instinctive approach to line, colour, and form reveals not only technical skill as a printmaker but also a bold willingness to experiment and innovate.

As a gallery committed to supporting artists at every stage of their practice, we are thrilled to celebrate this moment in Craig's career. The Little Things That Stick enriches our cultural landscape, rekindles shared memories, and highlights the power of creativity to inspire and connect.

Helen Seddon
Gallery & Programmes Manager at
The Turnpike Gallery

Big underpants at Leigh market

Every Saturday, Grandma would take me and my brother to Leigh Market. It was never our choice of outing, but the market was full of strange treasures that caught a child's eye. The one that never failed to make us laugh was a stall with the biggest Y-fronts we had ever seen. They looked so enormous we joked all three of us could fit inside a single pair with room to spare.

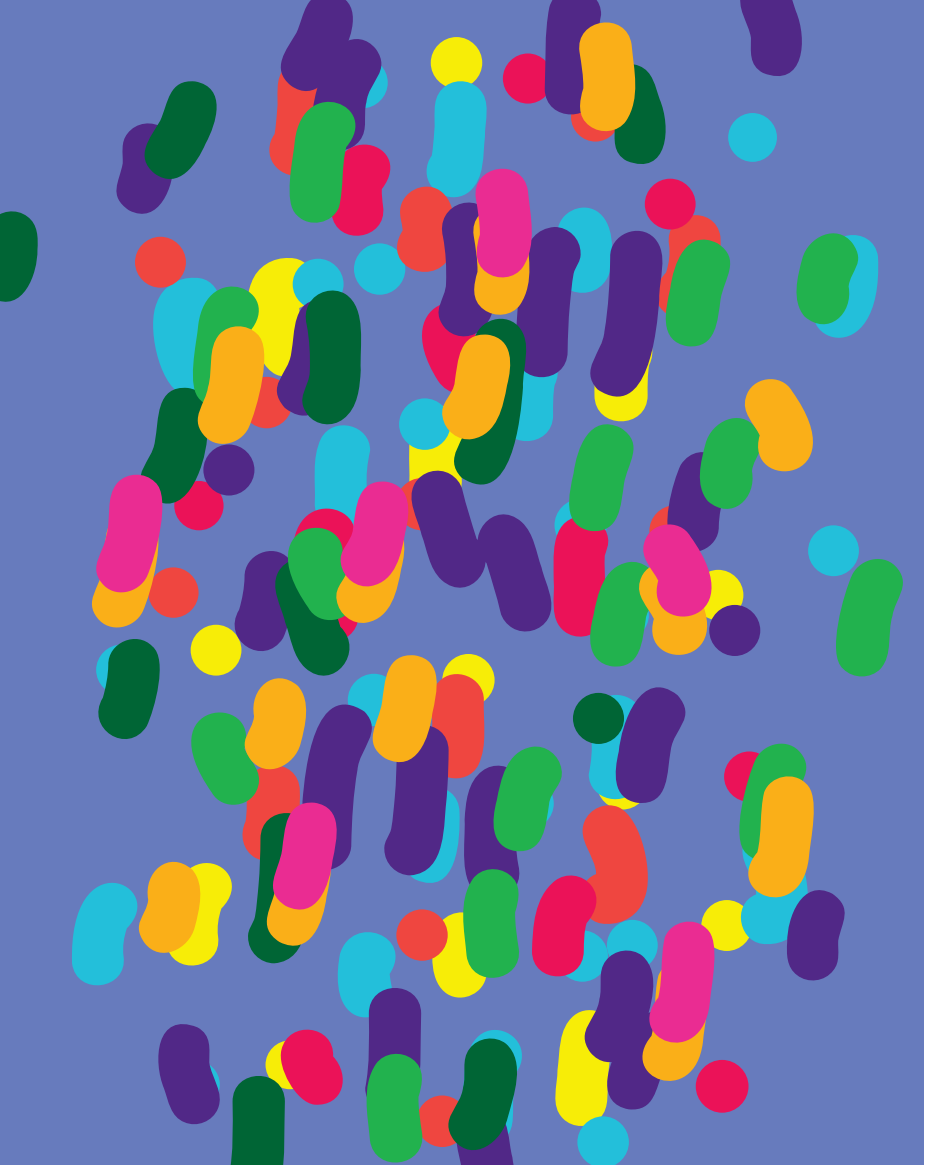
For us, it became a kind of ritual, pointing out the 'colour of the week' like it was some grand fashion show, commenting on whether this week's pants were stripey, spotty or plain. To two young lads, it was hilarious. To Grandma, mortifying. I can still feel her soft but firm hand tugging mine through the crowds before our giggles turned into full-blown chaos.

The market itself was overwhelming, a sea of people, smells and sounds that felt like another world. But those oversized underpants made the trip unforgettable. Looking back, it wasn't really about the pants at all. It was about being together, finding joy in the little things, and the kind of silliness that makes childhood so vivid.

Joey the budgie

Joey was my grandad's pride and joy. Unlike most budgies that lived behind bars, Joey spent more time out of his cage than in it. My grandad liked him to be free, and in a way Joey seemed like an extension of him, cheeky, stubborn, and happiest when given space. His favourite spot was on top of the kitchen door, a perch that made my grandad nervous every single day. We were constantly reminded not to slam or even close the door too quickly in case his tiny feet got caught.

Joey wasn't just a bird, he was part of the family. He could talk, mimicking voices and phrases, and his chirps filled the house with a kind of warmth that went beyond sound. I'll never forget the way he perched on my grandad's hand, leaning in as if to give kisses. For a child, it felt magical, a little bird choosing to trust you. Looking back, it's a memory that reminds me how small things can hold a whole lot of love. To this day I love birds and birdsong.

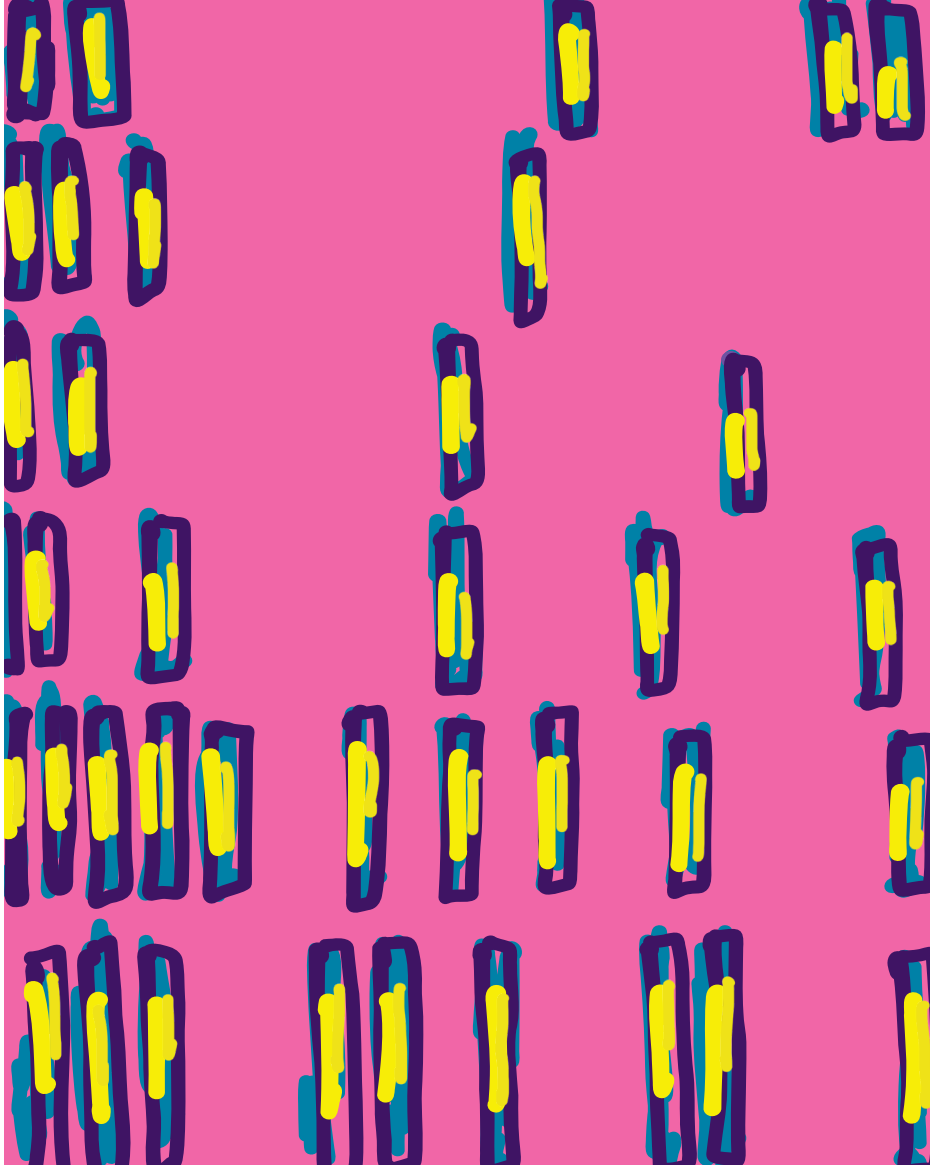


St Thomas' church

The church at the end of Grandma's road was our forbidden playground. The brick wall was crumbling, and we'd clamber over it to explore the grounds, even though we were always told off. The stained-glass windows were enormous, glowing with colour and shape, and I found them utterly mesmerising, like an adult version of a Beano comic come to life. We loved trying to "fix" the wall, moving bricks from one spot to another, probably making things worse, but it felt like we were protecting the church. Sitting on the wall, taking it all in, the quiet and peace of the place wrapped around us, and I can still feel that mix of awe and mischief today.

Big blockbusters

Next to my uncle's house was the holy grail of my childhood, Blockbuster. We called it Big Blockbuster as it was huge compared to the family run shop 'platts' that we were used to. Rows and rows of tapes stretched out like treasure waiting to be discovered, neon signs buzzing above, and hours could disappear just trying to pick the right film. It felt like a massive deal every single time. You could get lost reading the backs of the boxes, well, my cousins did the reading, and I'd mostly just pull VHS tapes off the shelves if the cover caught my eye. I'd hold them up, comparing titles, "This one? What about this one?" The air smelled of popcorn and plastic sleeves, and the excitement of deciding, knowing we could take one home and live in its world for a weekend, made it feel like magic. Blockbuster wasn't just a shop, it was a gateway to adventure, and I can still feel that thrill today.

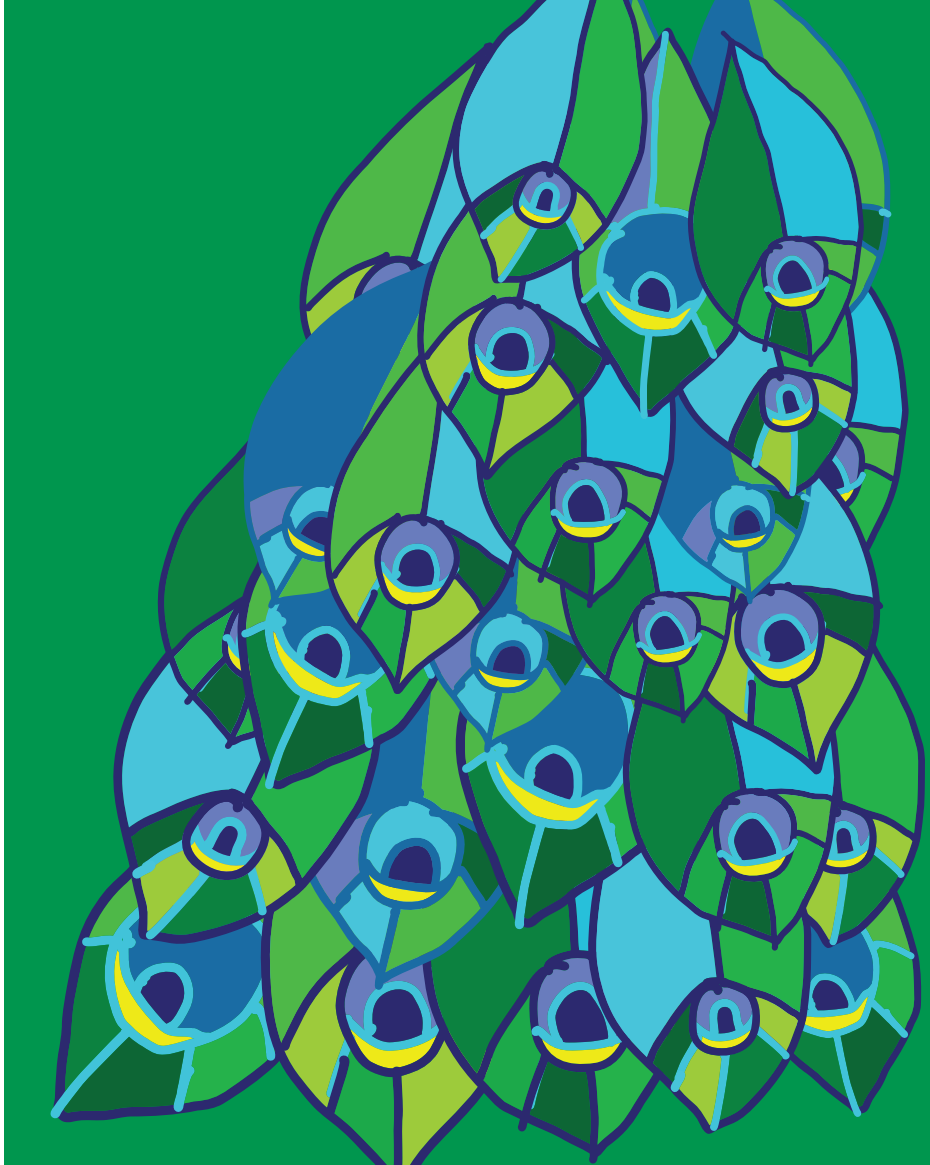


Big woolies

Woolworths was where we got our music. Pocket money saved up for the latest cassette single, tapes lined up in the racks, plastic crackling as you flipped through them. Our version of HMV, right there in little Leigh. I'd walk with my cousin from Atherton across the fields just to spend our pocket money together. Sweets and tapes from the bargain bucket bin were the best part, I loved not knowing what I was getting for 50p. Those random buys probably shaped my varied taste in music. We'd play the same tape for weeks, over and over, like it was the soundtrack to our lives.

Peacocks at Lilford park

Another one of those “I swear this happened” memories, though I’m not entirely sure if I made it up. Peacocks strutting around Lilford Park, their cries echoing across the lawns, looking fancier than anything else in Leigh. I remember feeling like I’d stepped into another world. Me and my brother would run and play for hours while my dad watched from the benches. So many of my memories of Lilford Park have that peacock noise in the background, I swear they were real.

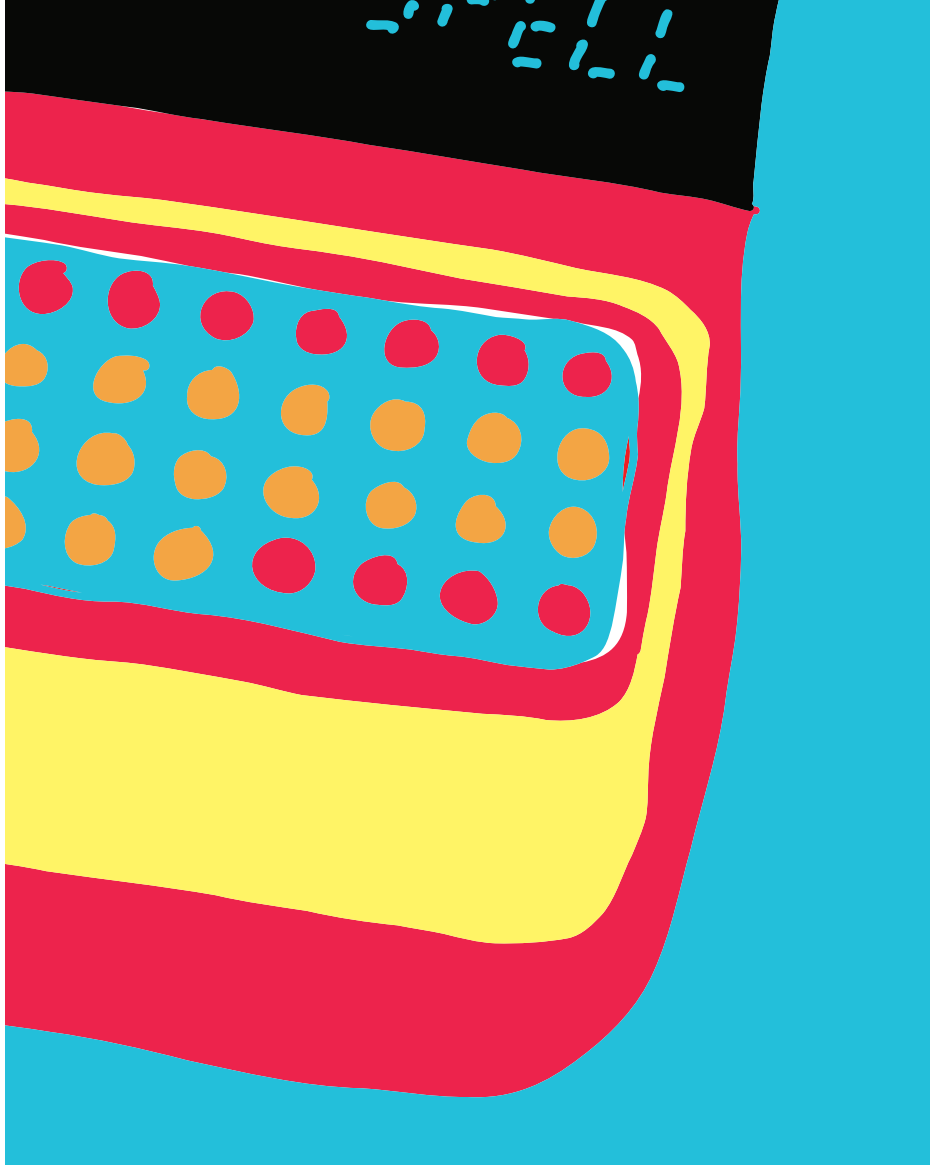


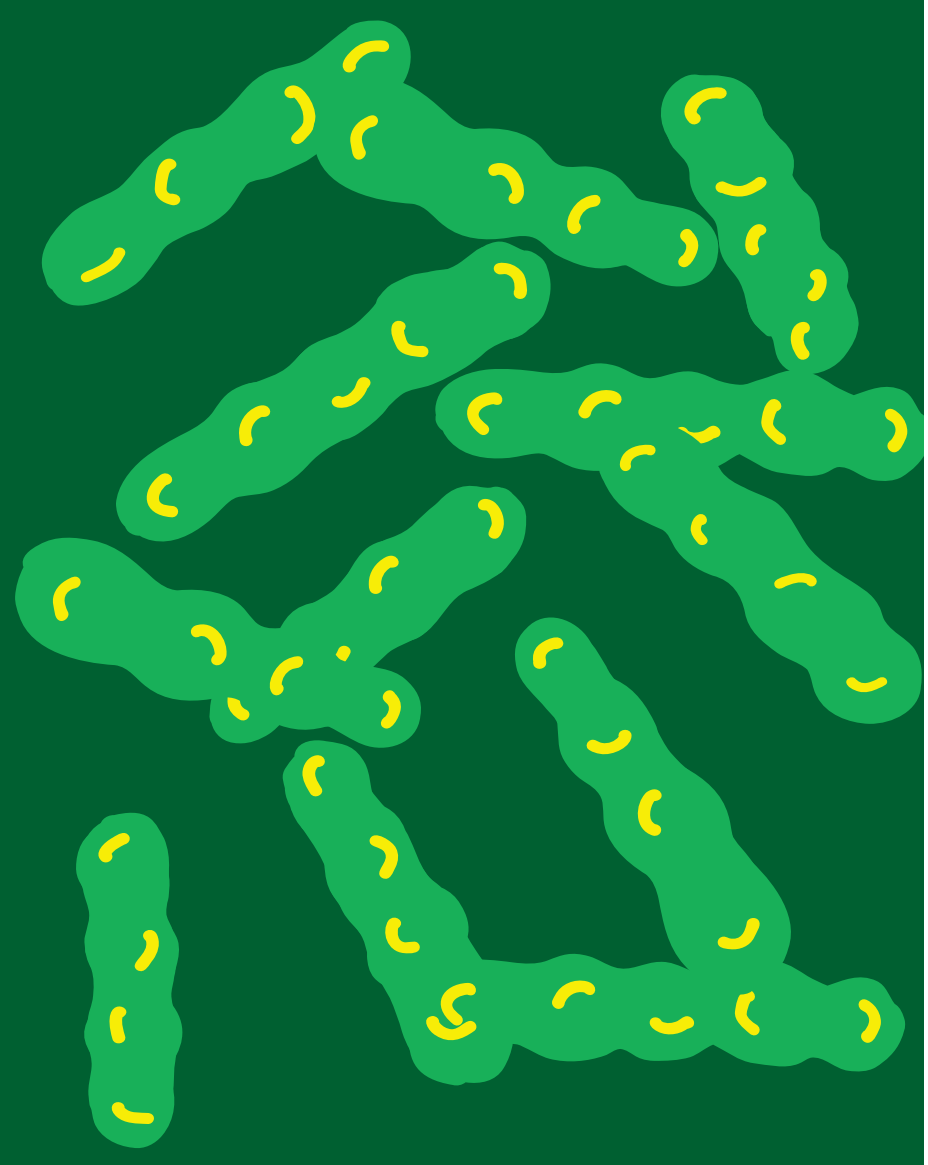
Anuver book a'can't read

Storytime with Grandma was magic. We'd go to the library and I'd pick books by their covers because I couldn't read them properly, always choosing the colourful ones. I'd take a book home and curl up on her knee while she read to me. Her voice was soft and kind, full of a gentle rhythm that made everything feel calm. I didn't care much about the words, I just loved being on her knee, feeling safe, and helping her hand turn the pages.

Me’speak n’spell

My Speak and Spell came everywhere with me. I can’t even count the times it got thrown down the stairs or dropped while I was playing and yet it still worked. That thing could take a beating. I loved the bright colours and the little robotic voice that asked you to spell a word and then read the letters out as you pressed them. Looking back, I probably drove my dad absolutely nuts with it. Funny really, because I still struggle with words sometimes.



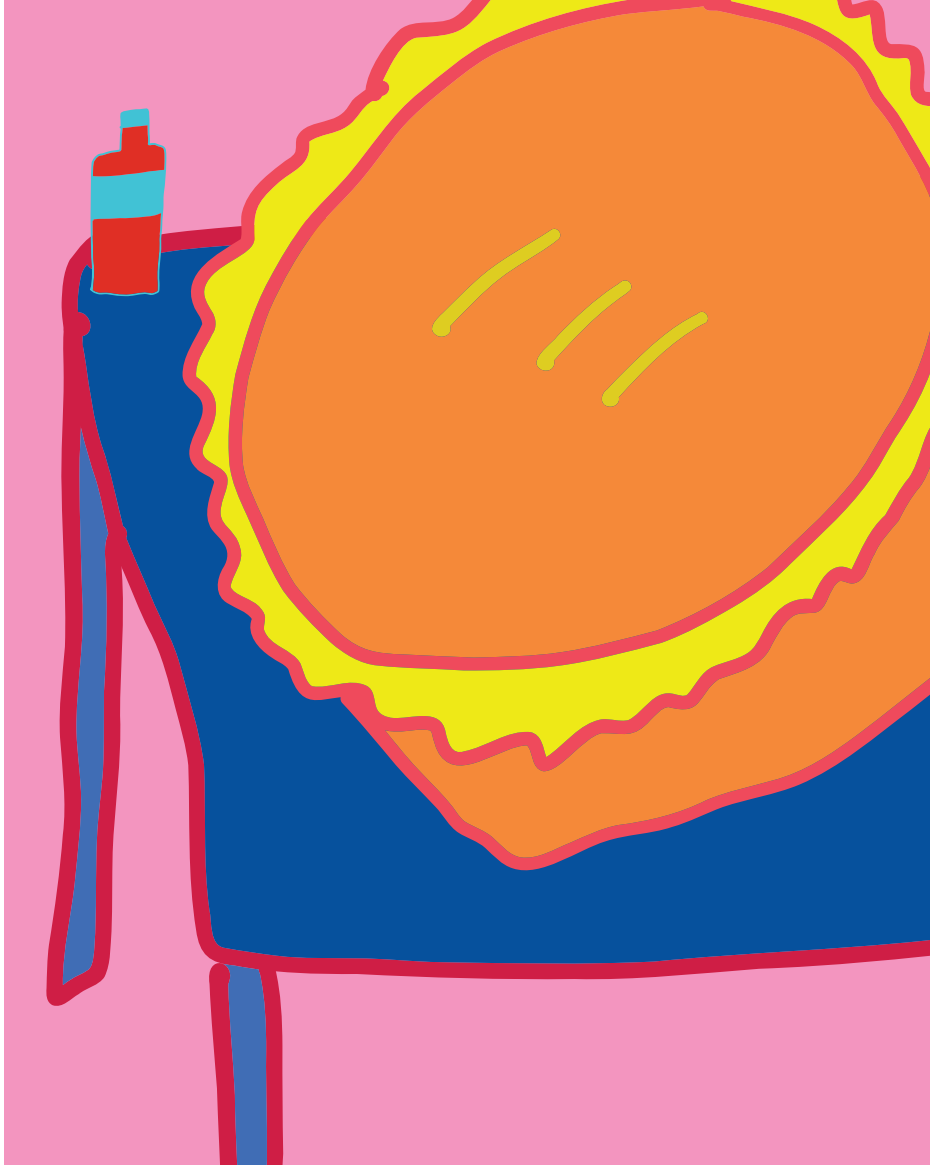


Don’t squash the bloody peapods

Grandma grew peas in the garden, and we’d go out just to squish the pods for fun. She’d shout at us to stop, but that only made it more tempting. The sound, the texture, it was irresistible. I was good, but also a bit naughty. I didn’t like being told what to do. She grew lots of things, but it was only the pea pods we couldn’t leave alone. They were like natural bubble wrap, and there was something strangely satisfying about the squish.

Brown sauce wiv me'pie

I have great memories of playing around the grounds of Gin Pit Club with my cousin. After hours of climbing, making dens and ending up knee deep in mud, we'd head back to the pub and get a Dawson's pie with a good squeeze of brown sauce. We'd sit around the table, grubby and tired, eating while we watched the comings and goings of the pub. The regulars were like family, always there, always smiling. It felt safe, like a place where we belonged.



Cindy an'er tennis ball

Grandad Smith had a dog called Cindy. We'd walk for what felt like miles through the fields, throwing her tennis ball again and again. The grass was taller than me, so the world felt huge and endless. I remember Grandad carrying a tube of tennis balls, always ready to keep Cindy happy. He didn't say much, but I liked that. It gave me space to drift off into my own world, where the walk felt like an adventure and I felt small, but part of something much bigger.

Leigh market

The market left a proper impression on me. The colours, the chatter, the fruit and veg piled high. And the sweet stall, where Grandma used to get us knock-off Bounties that always tasted a bit strange. The ceiling felt miles away, the metalwork up there making patterns I'd stare at for ages. The whole place was buzzing with noise and activity, almost overwhelming at times. To cope, I'd fix my eyes on those patterns above, finding calm in the shapes that seemed to hold the whole market together.

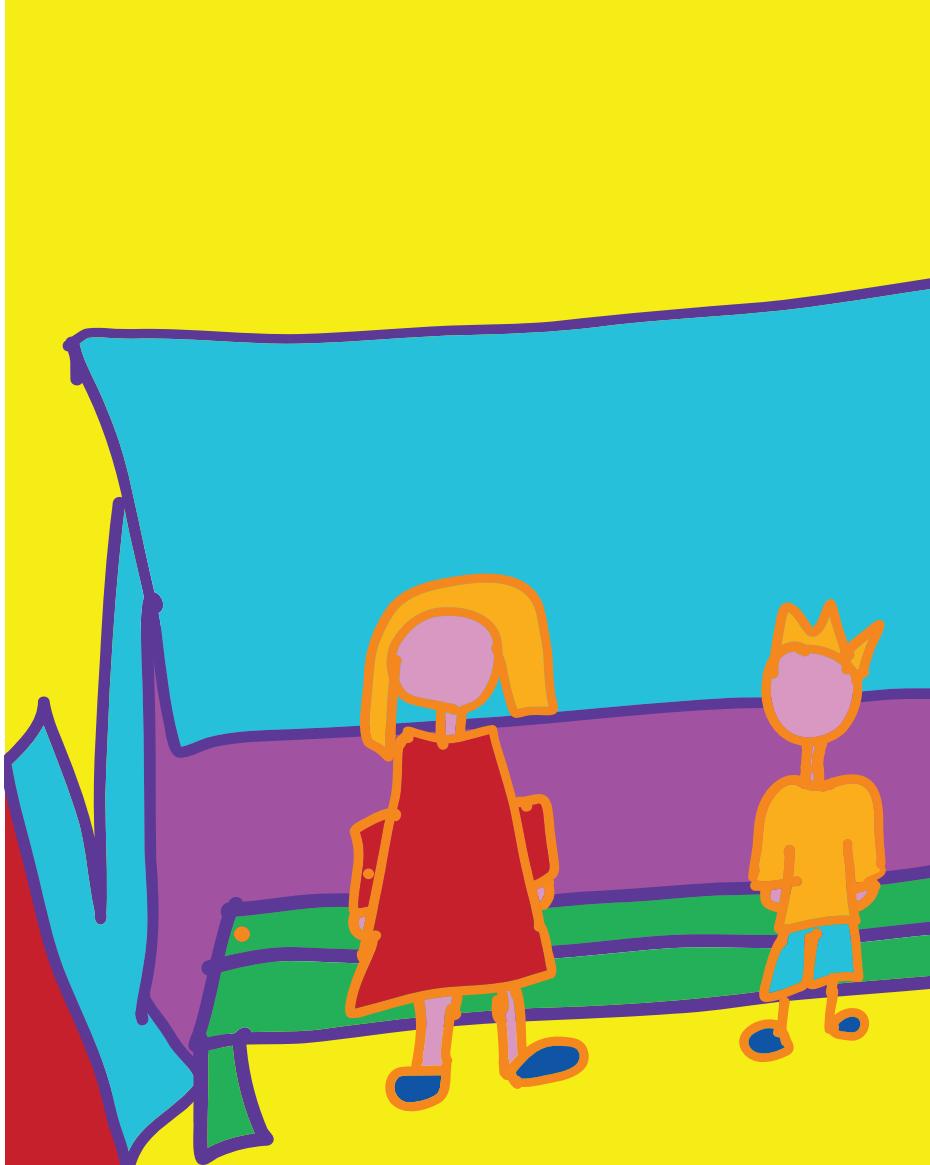
Anuver badge gran'ma has t'sew on'me trunks

My trunks were full of swimming badges. Every time I earned one, Grandma would sew it on for me, each stitch marking a little victory. I wore them like medals and felt super proud with every new one. I wanted to be just like my big brother, who already had them all, and I knew Dad was proud of us both. He'd always made sure I learned to swim from an early age. Looking back, this memory is about that pure childhood pride, the thrill of achieving something, and the way kids' imaginations run wild. I was convinced I could swim as fast as a shark, often embellishing the truth, sometimes being a little too honest.

Art at Jim, Irene, Chris n'Claires

My best friend, Claire, lived next door. Claire's mum, Irene, was pure gold. Extremely kind, patient, and endlessly creative, she'd sit with us for hours doing crafts and painting. Looking back, those afternoons were a turning point for me. They planted the seed of my creative life. Irene gave me the freedom to make without rules or pressure, just the joy of turning ideas into something real, and the joy of nurturing younger people.

Irene and Jim felt like my unofficial adoptive family. I'm not sure if they had an arrangement with my dad to look after me until he was home from work, but I was there a lot. They had an extension on the back of the house that became our playroom. It wasn't just Claire and her brother Chris; it was Jim and Irene, Nana, and Butch the dog too. The room had a big wooden table with a long bench we all sat on, scattered with paints, paper, and glue. The home smelled of cooked food, the energy was calm and loving, and creativity seemed to fill every corner.

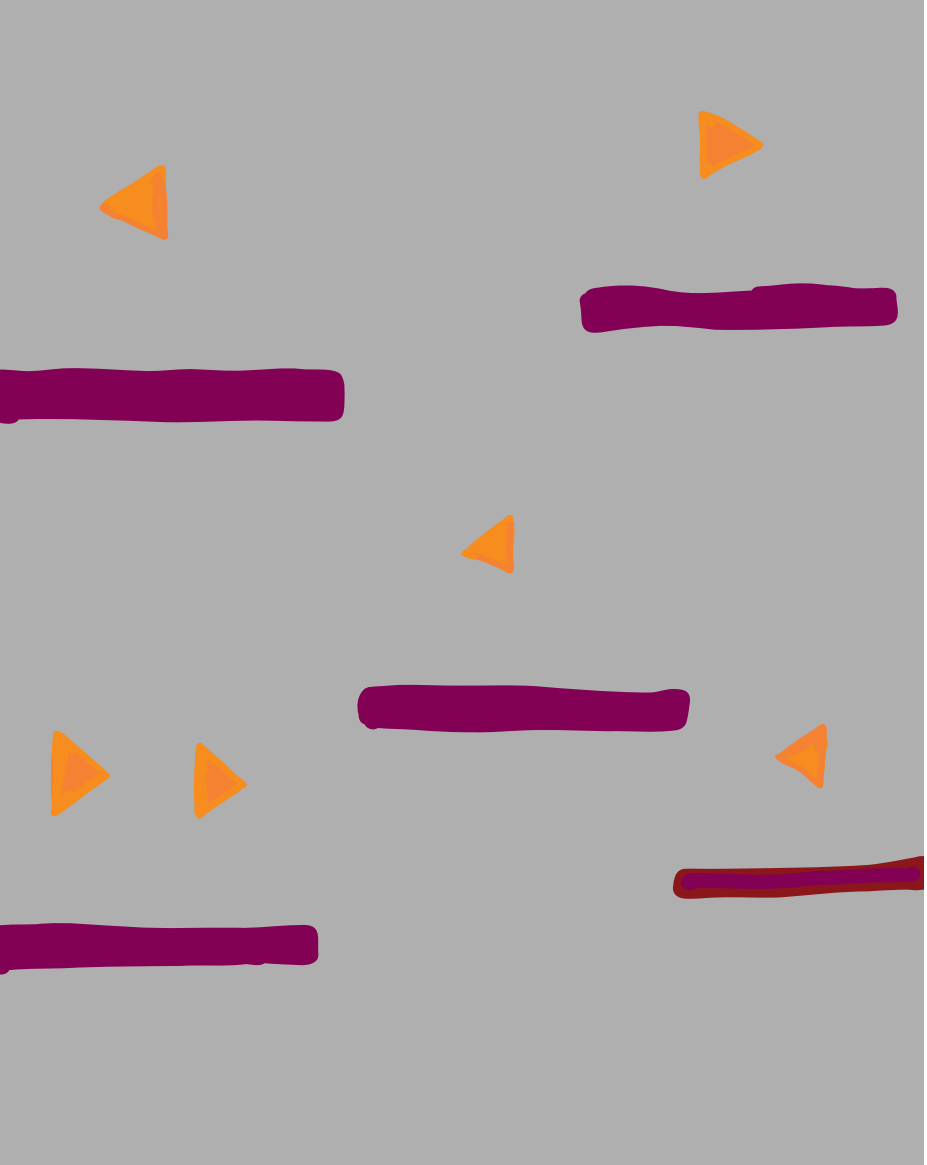


Holdin' gran'mas big soft hand

Grandma would often hold my hand, and I'd find myself playing with hers. Her rings always caught my eye, sparkling and drawing me in. Her hands were soft and padded, so gentle, yet the rings were solid and cold against my fingers. That contrast between her warmth and the chill of her jewellery is a feeling I can still recall as if it were yesterday. Sometimes it's almost like she's still here, holding my hand.

Lamas at lilford park

This is another one of those memories where I swear it happened. I'm certain there were llamas at Lilford Park. It felt like such a magical place, and I've got vivid memories of Dad taking us there and pointing out these strange, brilliant animals. Maybe it was a dream, maybe my imagination, but it's stuck with me ever since. Part of me still believes they were really there.



Grandads chaffinches

Grandad kept chaffinches in a big aviary in the back yard, and every morning I'd go out with him to help feed them. Their colours were so striking, little flashes of orange and brown, and their bright beaks looked like they were painted on. The sound of their song filled the yard, a rhythm that made those early mornings feel calm and special. Grandad loved those birds, and I think that love rubbed off on me. There was something almost magical about them, like they carried a bit of joy in every chirp.

Gran'ma n'grandads at Guest Street

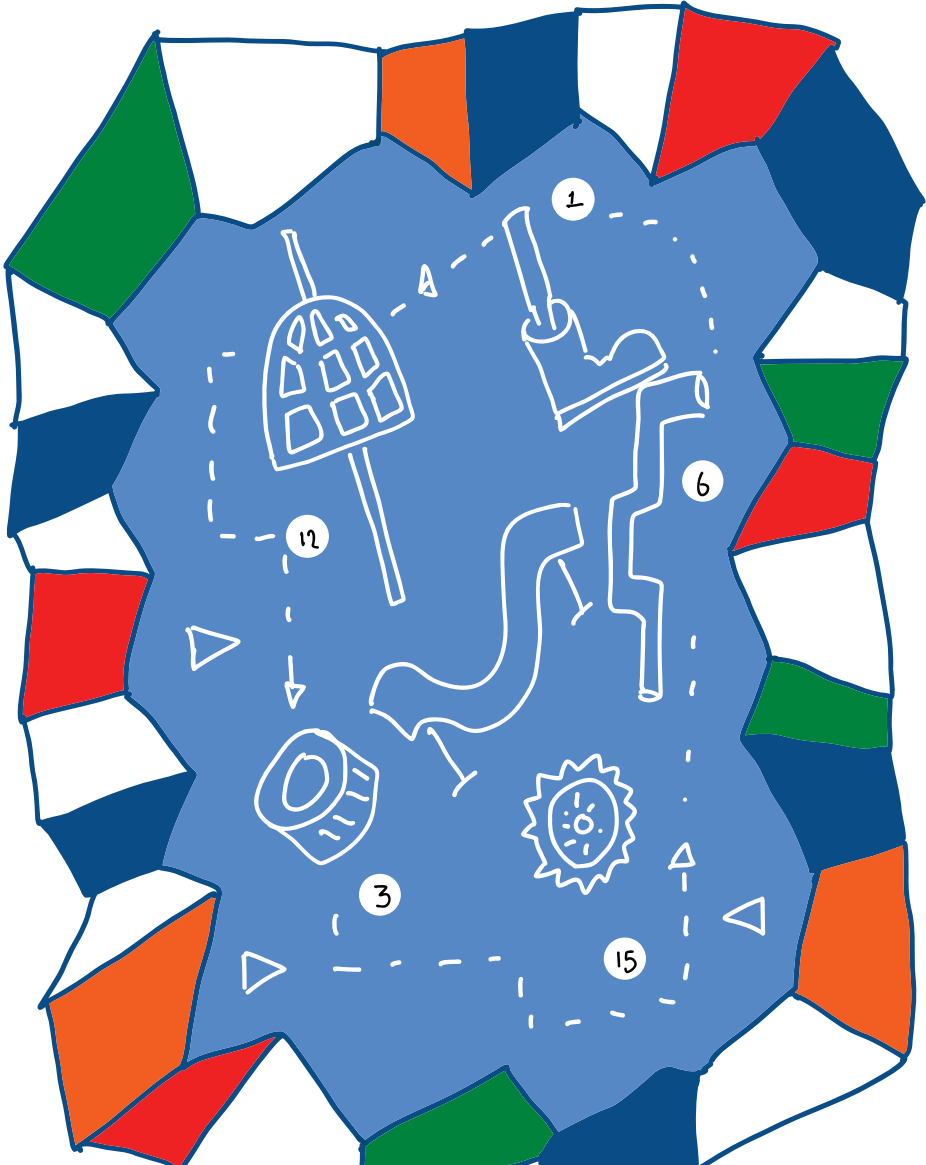
This was the heart of the family. Grandma and Grandad's house on Guest Street was always full of life, the smell of food drifting from the kitchen, laughter rolling from room to room, and that proper northern warmth that made everyone feel welcome. It was a place where stories were told, games were played, and you felt completely safe. Looking back, it was more than just a house. It was the centre of who we were, and it's the sort of place that never really leaves you, it just lives on inside you.

The great wall of Turnpike

Another one of those memories where I'm not quite sure if it's real or if I've dreamt it up. Walking up to the Turnpike with Grandma, there was this huge wall on the left. Dark and looming, it never seemed to match anything around it. It felt out of place, almost like it was guarding a secret. As a kid, I'd stare at it and let my imagination run wild, wondering what might be on the other side.

Mouse trap

Looking back, Mouse Trap is one of those games that left a lot of memories. Usually it meant me and my brother arguing over whose turn it was, but what I loved most was building the setup. It felt like precision work, each piece clicking into place just right. I liked the focus it demanded, the way everything had to line up perfectly, and the satisfaction of watching the trap finally work. It was a small world of order and chaos, all in our living room.

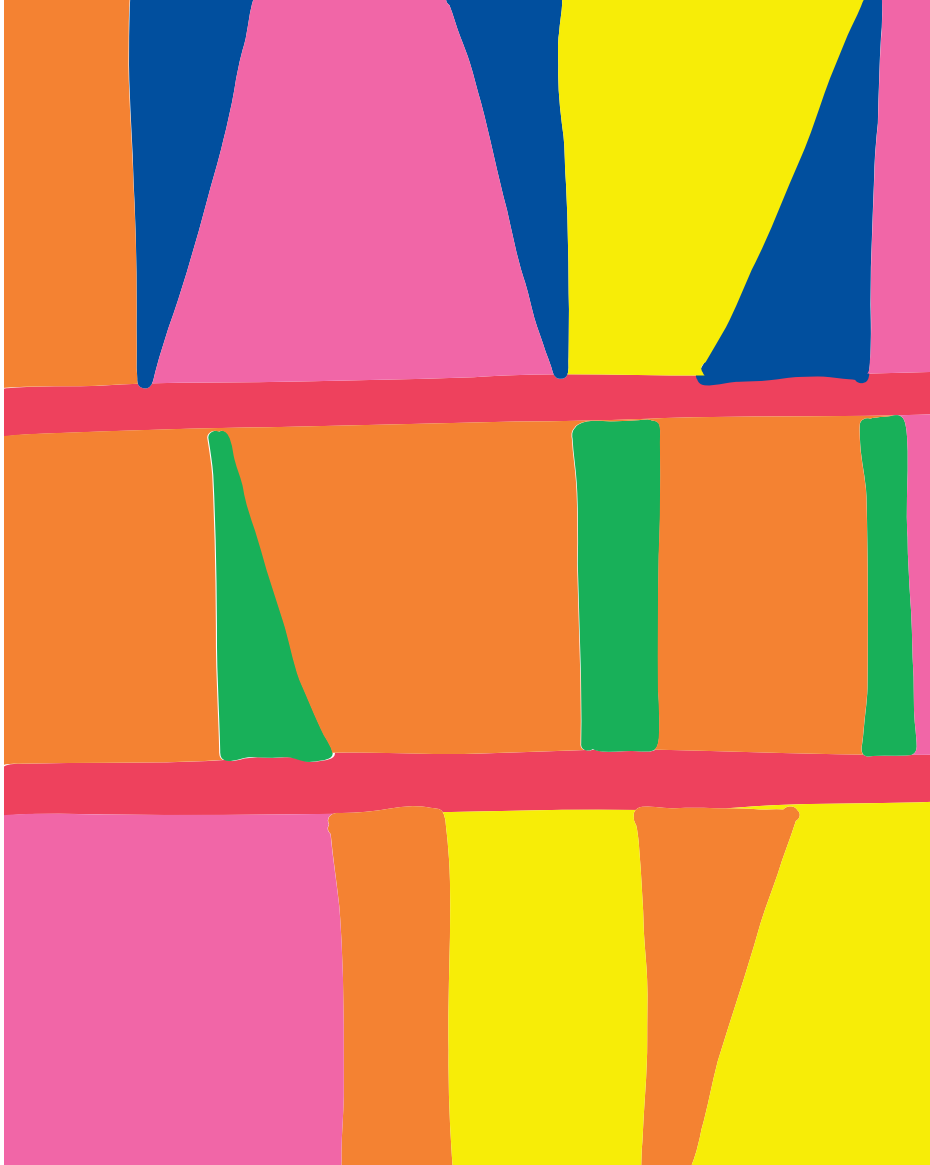


Libr’y corner

At the Turnpike, Grandma would drop us off in the kids’ corner. Books piled high, puzzles with missing pieces, tiny chairs that made us feel important. I swear there was a sand pit, though maybe I imagined that part. She always said she was just off to choose a book for herself, but looking back, I wonder if she just needed five minutes’ peace. Either way, we were happy there, lost in our own little world while she took a breather.

Spaces between the books

We always ended up in the Turnpike Library after the market. I wasn't much for reading back then, maybe it was my dyslexia or maybe I just wasn't interested, but I found my own kind of magic in there. I'd stare at the tiny gaps between the books on the shelves. They felt like secret windows into other worlds, little shapes that let me peek into the next aisle. While everyone else got lost in stories on the page, I was lost in the spaces in between, imagining what might be waiting just out of reach.

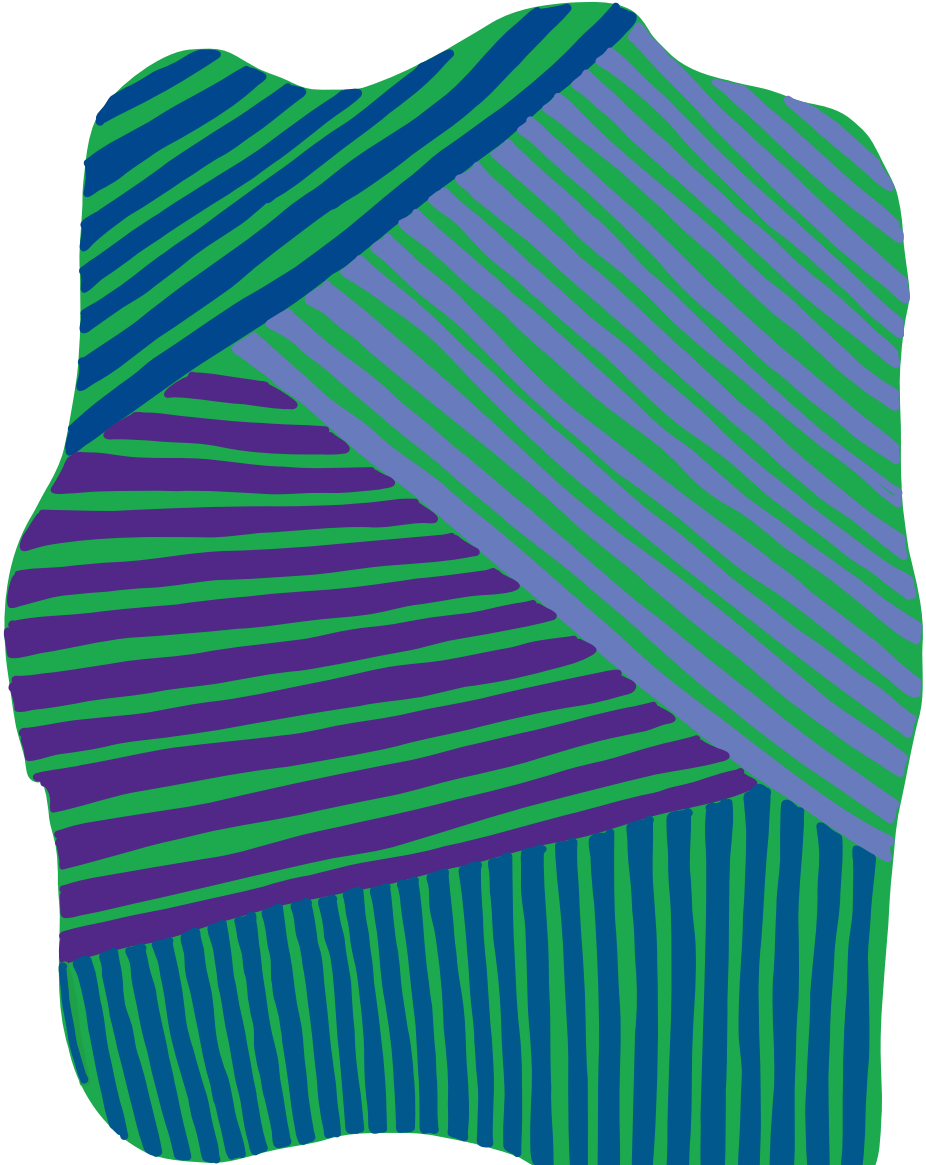


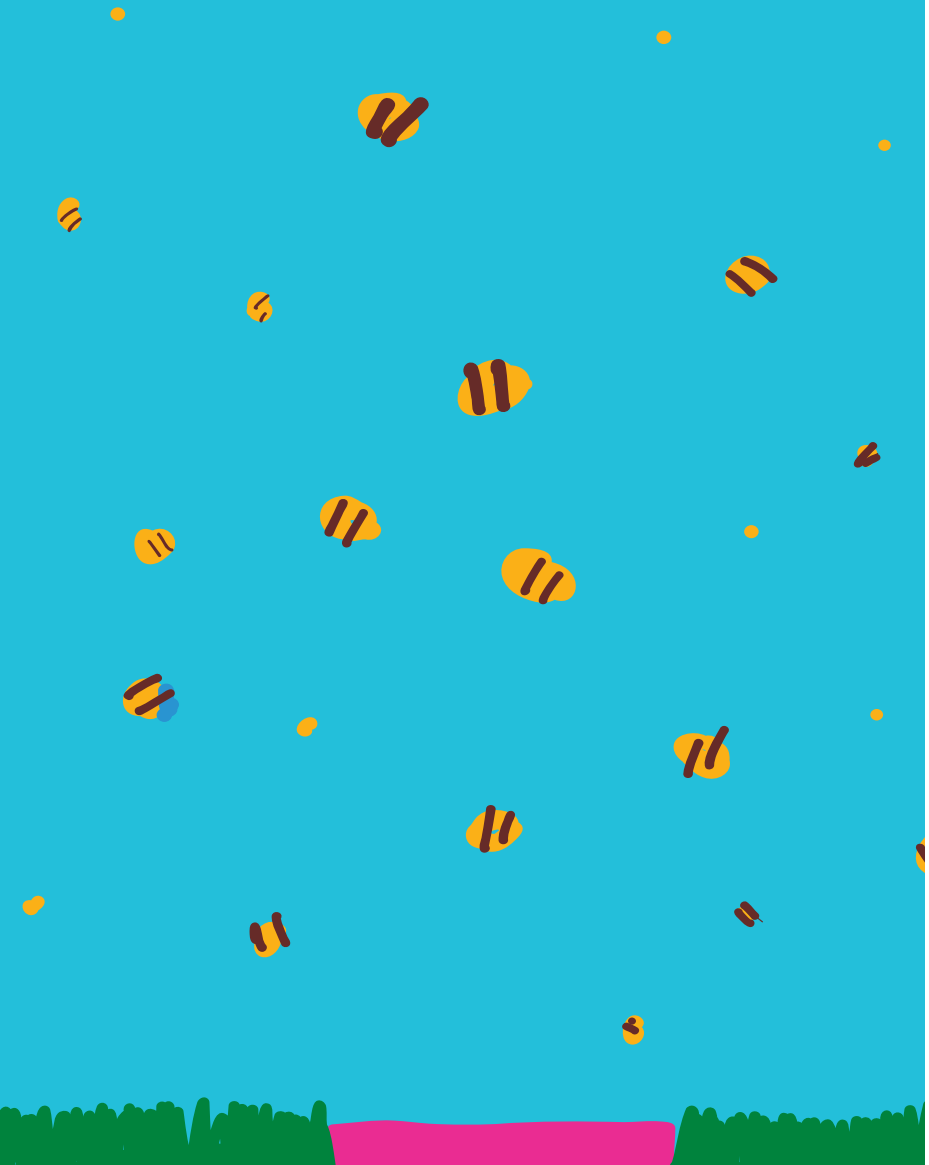
The babycham ladies

One of my memories of being in Grandma's pub was the ladies, all done up to the nines. Hair big, lipstick on, sipping Babycham like they were royalty. I'd sit and watch, fascinated by how glam they looked compared to the men, who were straight from work in their overalls and boots. The women arrived later, clouds of perfume and smoke drifting with them. Cigarettes burned between their fingers, ash falling as they gossiped and laughed. Every now and then they'd call me over, pinch at my chubby cheeks and say things like, 'Ooo I could eat you on a jam buttie.' It stuck with me, that mix of glamour, warmth and cheeky northern charm.

Cricket lawns at Gin Pit

The cricket pitch behind the club was perfect. From the veranda, you could see the neat green stripes glowing in the evening sun, sometimes even looking almost blue. It was the colours I remember most as the sun went down. The air smelled of grass and warm wood from the veranda. Everything felt still except for the distant chirp of birds and the soft chatter from inside the club. It was peaceful, full of colour and quiet, a little world of its own. The pitch was huge, magical even, with the forest lining the far edge where we would make dens. We weren't allowed on the cricket pitch, and I never tested the boundaries with Grandma, she was boss. Instead, we ran and cycled around the edges, making our own adventures while keeping out of trouble.





Don’t come cryin’ when ya get bloody stung

Uncle David’s garden had a bees’ nest, and for some reason me and the cousins thought it was a good idea to poke it with a stick. Stupid, I know. The air would hum with angry wings the second we touched it, and Auntie would come running out screaming at us to stop. But we never learned. There was something about the mix of fear and excitement that kept pulling us back. Someone always ended up legging it across the garden, arms flailing, hoping not to get stung. Looking back, it was pure childhood mischief, testing the limits and laughing even when we knew it might hurt.

Frazzles

After swimming lessons, Dad would always let us pick one thing from the vending machine. For me, it was Frazzles every single time. I can still see the spiral turning so slowly, the packet wobbling on the edge before dropping with a clunk into the tray. That little moment felt massive, like winning a prize. The chlorine smell still on my skin, wet hair sticking to my face, and a packet of Frazzles in my hand. That was happiness. It was never just crisps, it was the ritual of it, the treat at the end of doing something hard. A small victory that felt huge as a kid.

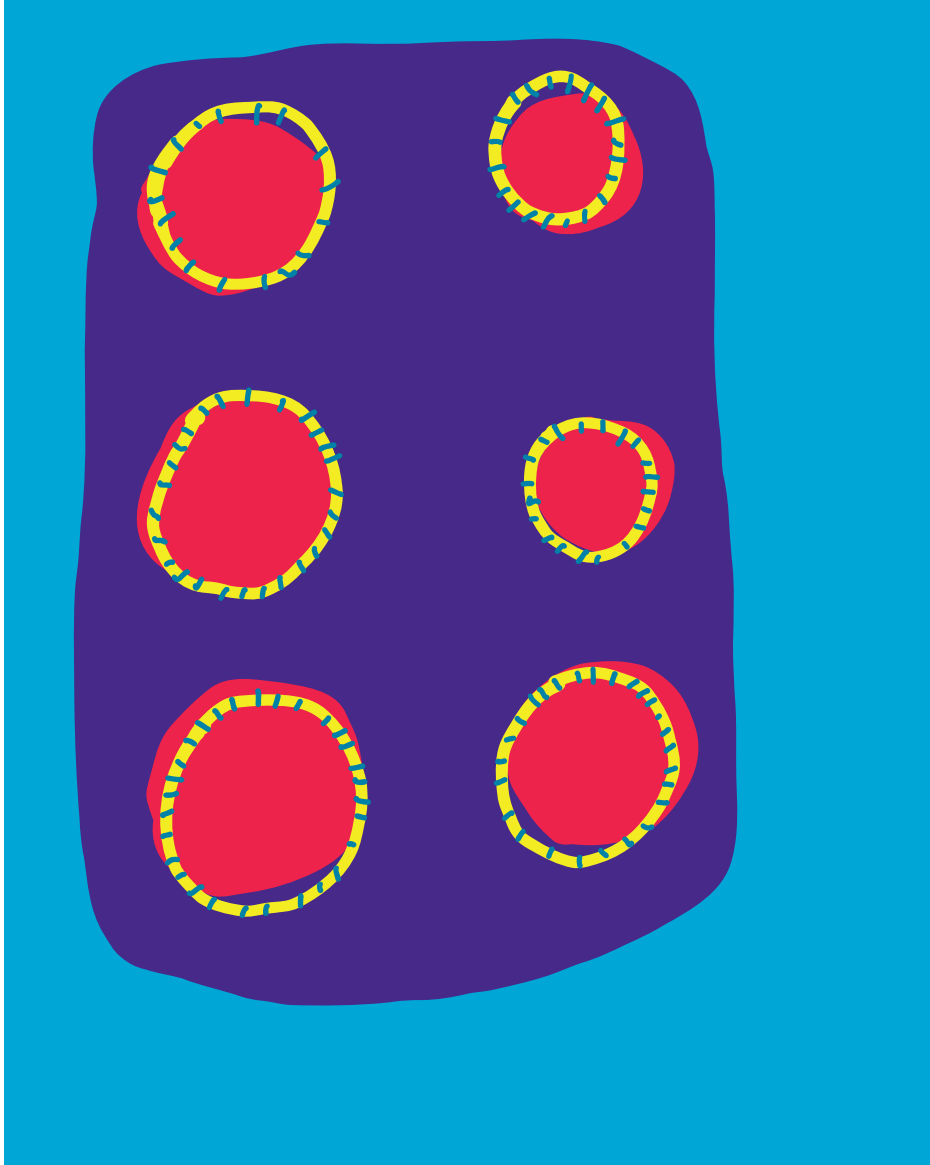
Proper disco at Gin Pit

The function room at Gin Pit Club was our kingdom. Sometimes it was for our own family parties, other times me and my cousin would sneak into someone else's, slipping onto the dance floor and blending in with strangers like we belonged there. Our favourite moment was when Superman by Black Lace came on. We knew every move, every shout, every silly action, and we'd throw ourselves into it like the whole room was ours.

Beer mats became our secret weapon. We'd pinch them from the tables, stick them to the bottom of our shoes and skid across the floor, laughing till our sides hurt. It didn't matter whose party it was, in those moments we were fearless, cheeky, and completely free. Looking back, that room was full of mischief and joy, and it gave us some of the best memories of being young.

Bakin' jam tarts wiv gran'ma

She was a brilliant baker, my grandma. She would pull up a dining chair so I could stand beside her and help. We made all sorts together, but jam tarts were always my favourite. I remember the smell filling the kitchen, the flour on my hands, and the mess we left behind. The sticky, sweet filling would bubble over the edges, and I could never wait long enough for them to cool before trying one. Looking back, it wasn't just about the baking, it was about feeling part of something special with her, a little world of warmth and care that I still carry with me.



Thas only one winner n'thats the bandit

Big John would sit at the fruit machine in Gin Pit Club, feeding it coins like magic. The lights flashing, the reels spinning with a heavy clunk, I was mesmerised by it all. To me it looked exciting, like he was on the edge of winning something massive every time. Grandma would shake her head and say, 'There's only one winner and that's the bandit.' She weren't wrong. Looking back, it was a proper lesson dressed up in flashing lights, a reminder that not everything that looks fun ends up paying out.

Holden Road

My uncle lived on Holden Road, and the golden rule was always the same: don't cross the road. It was said every time we visited, a warning that stuck in my head. That road became more than just tarmac, it was this invisible line between safety and danger. I remember standing on the edge, looking across, the traffic roaring past and the feeling that everything beyond it was off limits. As kids we tested boundaries in all sorts of ways, but Holden Road was one we never crossed. It still feels etched in my memory as a marker of caution and respect.

Summers at Gin Pit

My grandparents ran Gin Pit Club, and in summer it was like our own private adventure park. Big verandas, old tennis courts, and loads of outbuildings we turned into dens. Me, my brother, and our cousins ran wild, laughing and exploring for hours. We weren't allowed on the cricket pitch, but the surrounding woods were a massive playground, full of secret corners and hidden paths. At the bottom of the pitch was an old wooden cricket hut in disrepair, filled with old cricket gear. We made it our secret den, a place only we knew about. It became our little house, where we'd shelter from the rain or draw plans with chalk on the worn wooden floorboards. Those were the best summers of my life, full of freedom, adventure, and laughter.

Big underpants 2

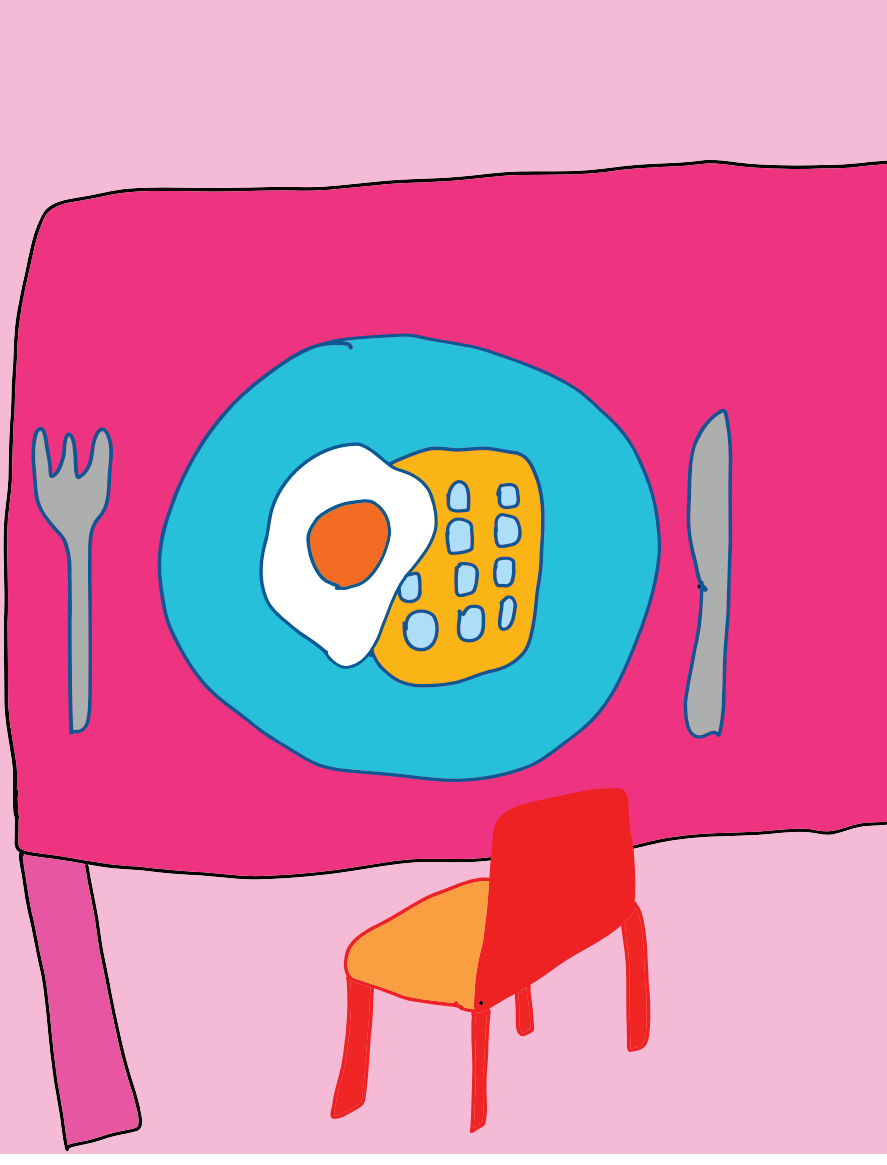
It was a sequel worth making. Every week brought a new pair of oversized Y-fronts hanging proud on the stall at Leigh Market. Me and my brother made it our catwalk, giving running fashion reviews on the latest drop, stripey or spotty, bright or plain. We thought we were hilarious, pointing and giggling like it was high fashion week. Grandma never found it as funny and would tug us away through the crowds. To us though, those giant pants were comedy gold, the kind of simple joke that never got old when you were a kid.

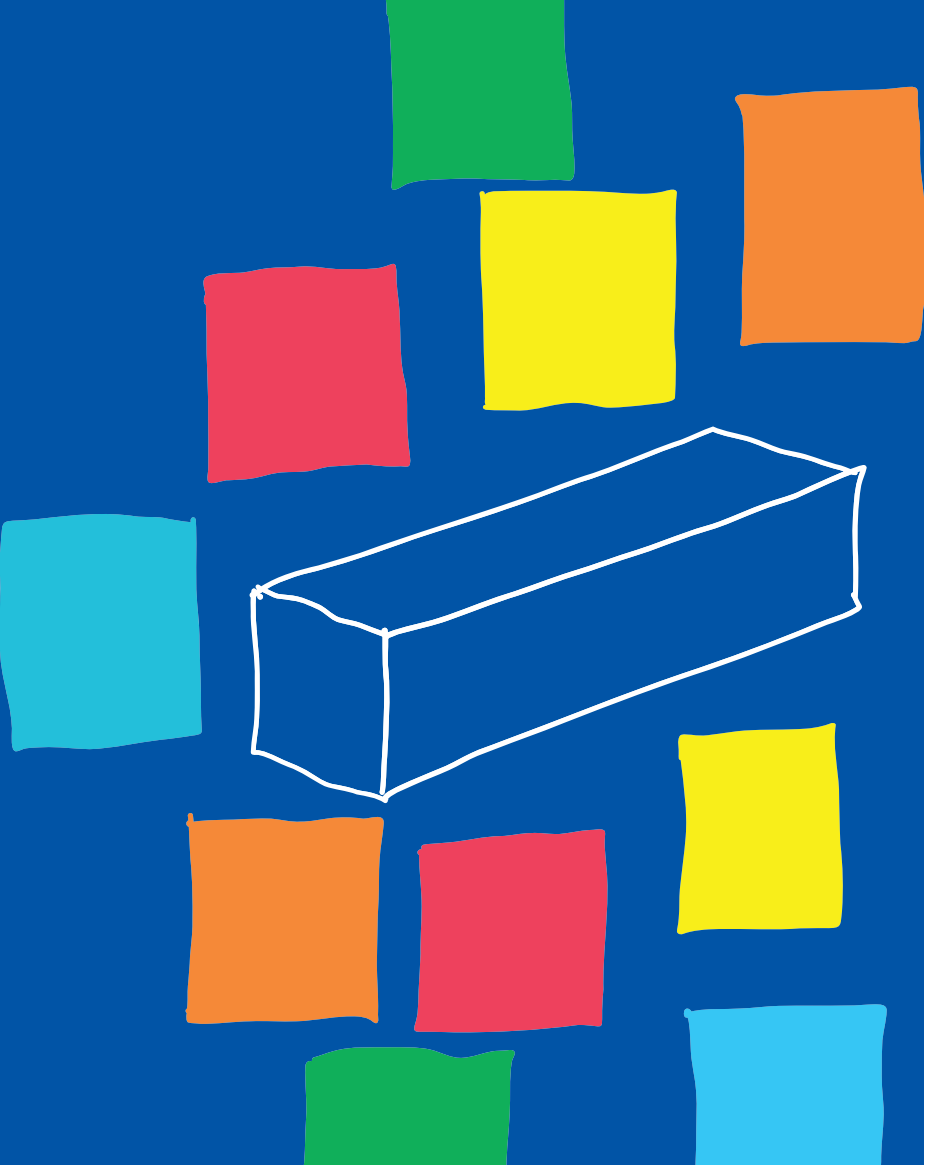
Stay off the asbestos roofs

Auntie Pat would shout at me and my cousin constantly, but it never stopped us. The garages were our playground, long flat roofs we'd climb and race across like we were invincible. Sometimes we'd push it too far, leaping onto the old folks' home roof and getting chased off by the warden. Looking back, we must have been a right bloody menace, but at the time it felt like pure adventure, the kind of trouble that made childhood exciting.

Am 'avin woffle n'egg f'me tea me

As a kid I wasn't really adventurous with food. I was probably the fussiest kid ever. My go-to meal was always waffle and egg, nothing else would do. If anyone asked what I wanted to eat, that was my answer every single time. It was simple, predictable, and somehow exactly what I needed back then.





Pictionary at christmas

One of my favourite games was Pictionary. Every Christmas night the whole family would cram into the lounge, the fire on, christmas gifts still about, bowls of nuts and chocolate around and we'd play for hours. I probably loved it most because I was bloody good at it. The room was full of laughter, guesses shouted out, and the buzz of everyone together. I can still remember sitting there in my freshly ironed shirt, feeling proud and ready to take on anyone with a pencil.

Me’sony walkman

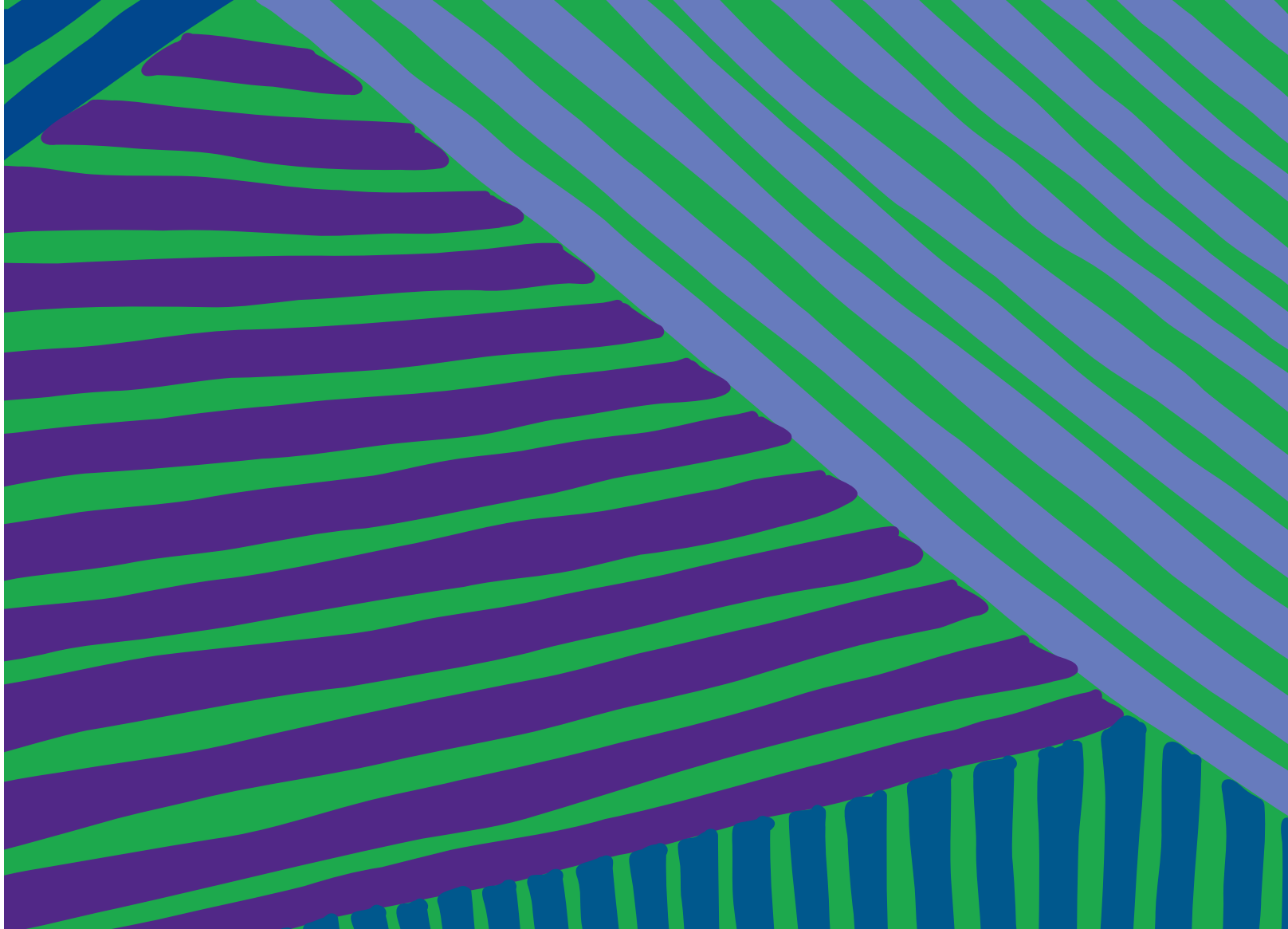
I’m not quite sure how old I was when I first got my Walkman, but it felt like one of the best things ever. It came with a pack of blank tapes so I could record anything I wanted to listen to. My tiny little mind was blown. That was when I became an avid listener of the Sunday charts, waiting and hoping for my favourite songs to come on so I could record them. I would tense up, praying the DJ wouldn’t talk over the beginning or end of the track. It felt like striking gold when the song played perfectly, just as I wanted it. That little device opened up a whole world of sound and excitement for me.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the support of Wigan Council, The Turnpike Gallery, and Leigh Library. Thank you for believing in the power of art, memory, and community, and for giving me the chance to bring these stories to life. Your commitment to creativity has helped turn personal memories into something that can be shared and celebrated with everyone.

Wigan Council

Funded by UK Government

Wigan Libraries

THE TURNPIKE GALLERY