Grammar School:

Every morning as we congregated for prayers we sang the school song,
I do not remember the real version but the following

“In 1650 the school began with 12 boys eating rolls,
They bent their backs to the master’s whacks
For the benefit of their sandshoe soles.”

In these days sneakers were called sandshoes or tennis shoes. I saw some advertised on eBay from Australia and the U.K. so the name still stands.

This was followed by morning prayers in the great hall in which all the staff would assemble in their gowns, and the head master or one of the other masters would lead us in the “Lord’s prayer,” or some other hymn or psalm. As a kid from a Jewish home I was exempt from these prayers, but I did not want to stand out and be different, so that I participated most of the time. I don’t think the exposure to prayer and another religion did me any harm.

Hutcheson’s Boys Grammar School was founded by George and Thomas Hutcheson in 1641. The original intention was that the school be for orphans. By 1650 there were 12 boys attending, thus on the roll in the school song. The location I attended was actually built in 1839 in Crown Street, at the edge of the Gorbals, which during my time was a notorious slum. In order to get there I had to take a tramcar from Queens Park where we lived, and walk a few blocks past the taunts of the local ruffians who would call us at the best Hutchie Bugs, or usually some other epithet. The school was a large Victorian style building, rather cavernous, dark and grey/black sandstone. It was quite a depressing site from the outside. It always seemed to me to be cold, and the main heating was the fireplace in the classrooms. It often was so cold, that the milk bottles would be brought in (each student was entitled to ½ pint of milk) for halfpenny a day, and placed in front of the fireplace to thaw out. The classrooms were large and desks organized in long rows. At each desk there was an inkwell filled with
blue ink, these were the days before fountain pens and ballpoints, and we all used old-fashioned pens with nibs, or pencil for writing. It was very messy, and I always seemed to have ink stained fingers and blots on my paper. As I remember classes were large, about 40 students per class. The desks were one continuous row seating about 12 boys.

There must have been about 800 students in the school, all dressed in school uniform, a blue cap with black band, blue blazer with the word “veritas” under the school emblem. Veritas, truth was the school motto.

I was a small dark boy with masses of curly hair. For some reason I was nicknamed Tony right away, and this stuck during my period at school. Either it was because I looked Italian, or because Tony was a corruption of Milton, take away the Mil and add a Y. I was about 10 when I started this school, having sat some type of exam and won a place as a Founders boy. In these days it was not called a fellowship, although a founders boy paid no tuition or at least very little. I came from quite a poor family who could not have afforded to send me to a private school. This must have been the original idea of the Hutcheson’s Brothers when they set up the school for orphans. My previous school, Scotland St, Elementary school was later to be recognized as an architectural gem, built by the famous architect Rennie Mackintosh, but it was in a poor working class district, and I apparently excelled among the other students. Thus I sat an entrance exam about the age of 10 or 11 and was assigned to the A section of the grammar school. By all accounts I was a very smart kid, who learned to read at about the age of three.

In Hutchie classes were divided along classical (language) lines. The top students were in the A classes where we studied Latin and then a year later Greek, the B class studied Latin and French, C, French and German and D only French. Each year was referred to as a Form, and I was in the 1st form, and school would continue through the 6th form. I soon found out that I was not good with languages, and was often belted for having more than two mistakes in Latin composition. The Latin Master was a Mr. Dorian, and he, at least to me, was a terror. I have heard from others that when he left Hutcheson’s for a position at another school, Albert Rd Academy, that he continued his reign of terror. I must have been a good student originally to continue in the A classes. To some extent I envied the boys in the B classes since they were at least learning something useful, a modern language, namely French. It seemed to me that the training I was receiving would be good for the ministry or law, but not for much else. We
did have some mathematics, some art (drawing) and history, mostly Scottish history and of
course English and singing. I distinctly remember all the Scottish songs such as Annie Lurie
and “I tak the high road “etc. that we sang. Most were probably of Jacobin origin, and
encouraged a sense of Scottish nationalism, as did history, which always seemed to revolve
around the wars between Scotland and England. I must have covered the story of Robert
Bruce and William Wallace dozens of times. Later on we had some “ British history” which
always stopped at that villain Napoleon! There was, at least in the years I attended, no
chemistry or physics. Other private schools were for science such as Allan Glen Academy.
I was a very quiet boy, unfortunately not interested in sport. We had cricket and soccer once
or twice a week in the schools private playing fields, somewhere in the Southside of Glasgow.
I usually stood aside and was a spectator, or later on did not go at all. I was a very lonely boy
at school and had few good friends. I had one friend in 2B and 3B, a Donald Dickson (or
Dickenson) with whom I would go out to tearooms, or visit his home. We enjoyed each
other’s company and I was made very welcome by his parents. His house was much richer
and cleaner than mine, and I was embarrassed to invite him home. When I left school in 1946
or 1947 I lost contact with him. I did write him a letter explaining my motives for leaving
Scotland but he could not understand them. I’ll leave my motives for another chapter.
I have tried to figure out what made me so shy and quiet, and in many respects anti-social and
a loner. I was actually a happy child, and had a fairly happy childhood. I spent a lot of time
with my grandparents, my mothers parents, and they always spoiled me in terms of sweets,
money etc. They gave me a lot of love. My parents sent me to various classes, such as music
(piano), dance, (tap and Scottish) and probably indulged me when they could hardly afford it.
Was the shyness genetic? Looking at my own children and grandchildren I find some of the
same characteristic. Perhaps I was self-sufficient and did not need the rowdiness of other
children. I spent a lot of time on my own in the public library from a very young age, before
even going to Hutchie. I got a great amount of enjoyment from reading. I immersed myself in
the 10 volumes of the Book of Knowledge that I must have received as a present about the
age of 10. I had all kinds of children’s encyclopedias.
Was being Jewish a factor in this lack of social interactions? Although the family was not
religious, I heard a lot of talk about things a Jewish boy does not do, such as play football, go
to the local swimming pool (the baths), play with “hooligans” etc. At a very young age, about
9 or 10 I was sent for private Hebrew lessons to a woman named, Eva Ross, who lived in Sinclair Drive, in Battlefield. She was to have a tremendous influence on me, introducing me to Zionism, the idea that we did not belong in Scotland but in our own country, Israel (Palestine) and to the youth movement Habonim. This was a labor Zionist youth movement, akin to the scouts but with nationalist and socialist overtones. I also started going to heder (Hebrew-religious school) to learn Hebrew, study Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible) and how to pray. There I did make friends with other kids, including Tommy Berman, a “refugee” from Czechoslovakia who had been adopted by a friend of my mother, Mrs. Miller, and through Tommy other kids including Basil Rifkind. Later on in life, about the age of 14-16 we three hung around together for a short time. I was also influenced greatly by the Rabbi at Niddrie Road Synagogue, which was very close to our house on Dixon Ave. Rabbi Singer “adopted” me and decided I should play an important role in the community and in the synagogue. Thus all these influences and to some extent “brain washing” on a small child must have made me feel different from all the other non-Jewish children. I was the only Jewish boy in my elementary school class and likewise in my class at Hutchie. And this might have had a defining influence. Later on the struggle between the Jewish underground movements in Palestine and the British army made the situation even more acute. In fact during this period I became friendly with a Bernard Epstein. I have no idea where I met him, perhaps in Heder. He or his father subscribed to the “revisionist” newspaper, which supported the Irgun Zvei Leumi (Etzel) in Palestine, and was very anti-British. I was deeply influenced by this and I suppose this added to my estrangement and feeling of not belonging in Scotland.

I did consider studying music (piano) seriously. I had a good ear for music, and could sight read extremely well. I gave a few performances at local events, and even had a few pupils for a time. I enjoyed playing Chopin and in particular Beethoven’s Pathetique Sonata. However again at the age of 16 I lost interest. Perhaps all sorts of hormones were active. Although there were girls in the Habonim group, we basically hung around as a group, and did not have any sexual relationships. This did not occur until I had left Glasgow and went on Hachsharah. (Training farm for life in a kibbutz in Israel).

My studies certainly suffered from my other interests and problems, and I went from being an A student to what I would term today a D student. I think it was lack of interest in the
subjects, and knowing that my future was not wrapped up in British society. About the age of 16 I told my parents I was quitting school. No one made any attempt to persuade me otherwise and thus finished a chapter in my life. One of my friends, Tommy, who went through the same brain washing tells me that the same “leader” came to his parents house to persuade them to let him go on Hachshara, but his parents would not hear of it before he finished high school, and matriculated. My experiences during this time in Habonim I will leave for another chapter. The movement had a great influence on me. Thus I did not complete high school, and this was to cause me many problems later in life. I really was a high school drop out!

I recently visited Hutchesons’ grammar school. It is a new school, the old building in Crown Street having been torn down. The new School is in a nicer part of the city, still in the South side, not far from Queens Park and is now co-educational. It’s emphasis has shifted completely, the emphasis being on the arts, music, and sciences. There was little evidence of a classical education. There are very nice facilities for all of these subjects, and I was quite impressed by what I saw. Two students showed me around, very proud of the modern music rooms and laboratories. Quite different from the days that I attended. The student body is now very heterogeneous, a large percentage Indian, Pakistani, and Jewish. In fact “diversity” of the student body appears to be important, not at all as in my days at the school.