A BOOK FOR LIFE

ERNEST BATEMAN

Excerpt from 'A Book For Life' by Ernest Bateman

When I was growing up, the other boys used to get the 'Boys Own' comic. But I didn't because there was too much writing in it for me. I found out when I was 42 that I had dyslexia but they didn't know about any of that when I was a child, and at school they just treated me like I was daft. It was really difficult at junior school because we sat in a big class of 50 and there was lots of copying off the board. Nobody in high school helped me catch up with the others either, and I never did manage to get the hang of reading and writing.

They moved me to a special school when I was 13. They tried to teach us to read and they had more patience than at my previous school. But mostly they just taught us to mend shoes and clogs. I stayed in that school until I was 15 because they gave me an extra year to catch up. There were lots of children who'd missed out on their education during the War. I still struggled though, and I had to get by with trying to remember everything I heard instead of writing it down. By the time I left, all I could write was my full name and my address, that was it.

After I left school I trained to be a bricklayer. When I took my exam I took it in a room with four teachers throwing questions at me. One teacher said, 'If you'd written that down you could have passed your City and Guilds because your knowledge is good. But as it is we can only give you a Trade Pass.' They were surprised how I'd managed to learn it all. It was because my brother Dennis had put it all on tape, on one of those old reel-to-reel jobs the size of a suitcase. I bought it myself specially to do this. But I'd always had to be good at

memorising things.

Nobody ever guessed I couldn't read. I used to ask people to read street signs for me and I'd tell them I'd left my glasses at home. So really, I had glasses before I had glasses.