

# Shoes were for Sunday (1)

Molly Weir was a Glasgow-born journalist and actress. The next two passages come from her autobiography, **Shoes were for Sunday**, in which she describes her childhood in the Springburn area of the city shortly after the First World War (1914–1918).

## *Rescue by tramcar*

Up until 1962, public transport in the city of Glasgow was largely provided by trams which were powered from overhead wires and ran on tramlines laid in the middle of the roads. Here, Molly Weir remembers some incidents involving tramcars in her childhood.

## Extract



- 1 One of the most dramatic stories told to me by my mother was of an accident to me in babyhood, when a tramcar was pressed into the rescue operation. I was about nine months old at the time and my mother had stood me up on the sink-ledge by the window while she cleared up the bathing things before putting  
5 me to bed.




## Extract continued

The china bath, washed and dried, was beside me on the draining board, and when I turned round at the sound of my father's key in the door, my foot went through one handle, and I  
10 crashed to the floor. The bath broke into a dozen pieces, and an edge cut through the bridge of my nose like a knife. My mother used to shudder as she described the blood as 'spurting up like a well' but my father, quick as lightning, seized the two cut edges of my skin between his fingers, bade my mother throw a shawl  
15 round me, and before she knew what was happening had dashed down two flights of stairs. He leaped on to the driver's platform of a passing tramcar.

'Don't stop till you get to the Royal Infirmary,' he ordered. The driver was so impressed with his urgency that he did exactly that,  
20 and all the passengers were carried willy-nilly to the doors of the infirmary. To me the most impressive part of the story was that the tram wasn't even going near the infirmary on its route. It should have turned at right angles at the points long before then. I was astounded that a tramcar should have been used in this way  
25 as an ambulance for me, and that the driver had dared vary the route from that marked on the destination board.

It was maybe this thrilling piece of Weir folklore which started my love affair with tramcars. When I was a little girl I only had the penny for the homeward tram journey, when my legs were  
30 tired after the long walk into the town for special messages. It would have been impossibly extravagant to ride both ways. That luxury was only indulged in when travelling with Grannie, and the journey to town then seemed so different from the top deck of the tram, the landmarks so swiftly passed compared with my  
35 usual walking pace.

When a halfpenny was laid on the tramlines it became a pretended penny after the tram had thundered over it and flattened it out most satisfactorily. To achieve this, we flirted under the wheels of the trams quite fearlessly, for we were so  
40 familiar with the sight of them rocketing past our windows we saw little danger. I never knew any child to be injured by a tram. We were as surefooted as mountain deer, and the drivers were



## Extract continued

quick to spot a faltering childish stumble on the rare occasion this happened, and to apply the brakes in good time. They'd all  
 45 played on the tramlines themselves when children, and our games didn't make them turn a hair. If a child was occasionally scooped up in the 'cow-catcher' – a metal shovel arrangement worked by the driver to remove any obstacle in his path – well, that was all right. Wasn't that what the cow-catcher was there  
 50 for? And it would be a good lesson for the youngster for the future.



## Questions



- 1 In about 30 words, write a summary of the accident as described in the first two paragraphs. *(4 marks)*
- 2 What were the two things that Molly's father did immediately afterwards? *(2 marks)*
- 3 There are a number of similes in this passage.
  - a) Quote two separate examples. *(2 marks)*
  - b) Take one of the similes you have chosen and explain how good you think the comparison is. *(2 marks)*
- 4 Quote the phrase which explains why the tram driver did what Molly's father told him to do. *(1 mark)*
- 5 Explain what Molly later thought was 'the most impressive part of the story'. *(2 marks)*
- 6 Find a word or phrase from the passage that fits each of the following meanings:
  - a) 'sudden, striking, full of action'
  - b) 'stories from the past, handed down from one generation to the next'
  - c) 'wasteful of money' *(3 marks)*
- 7 Re-read the last paragraph. In your own words, describe the trick that the children used to play on the tramlines. *(2 marks)*
- 8 Explain in your own words 'we flirted under the wheels of the trams quite fearlessly.' *(2 marks)*

- 9 Quote another expression that shows how confident the children were when they played this trick. (1 mark)
- 10 a) What is surprising about the attitude of the tram drivers to what the children were doing? (1 mark)
- b) Why did the drivers take this attitude? (1 mark)
- 11 Explain in your own words what the 'cow-catcher' was. (2 marks)

**TOTAL MARKS: 25**

## Taking a closer look . . .



### Genre

A genre is a type, or branch, of writing. For example, science-fiction, fantasy or romance.

Molly Weir's book belongs to the genre of **autobiography** – a word which is formed from three different Greek words:

*auto* = self (as in *automatic*, something that works by itself)  
*bios* = life (as in *biology*, the science of life)  
*graphos* = writing (as in *graphic*, which relates to the presentation of material in the form of drawings, diagrams or writing)

An **autobiography** is when *you* write the story of your own life.

A **biography** is when *someone else* writes the story of your life.

### For practice

In this list you will find the titles of nine books, a short description of what they are about, and a list of genres. However, these are all mixed up. Sort this material out into a table as follows:

Genre	Title	Summary of Contents
Fantasy		
Crime		
Biography		
Autobiography		
Adventure		
Travel		
Science fiction		
Horror		
War		