

## The Silver Key in the Blue Box

"Twenty One Today, Twenty One Today,  
She's got the key of the Door  
Never been Twenty One before"

It was my twenty-first birthday party and everyone was singing in unison. And there nestled between the cake and the presents, was a silver front door key in a blue box.

Our family are great ones for traditions, like a happy rainbow shining over the house. Nothing changes. Only last Friday I pulled out my late Mum's folder of recipes, handed down from generation to generation, to make a roly poly pud. "4oz of plain flour, 2oz of suet, handful of sultanas, mix with some water. Not too soggy". I stirred the mixture together with my Mum's old bone-handled flat knife, rolled the dough on the floured board with my hands into a cylindrical shape, wrapped it in grease proof paper, then in a pudding cloth and fastened it with an old nappy pin kept in the drawer for the purpose. Dropped it into an old saucepan of boiling water for 1 1/4 hours before serving with a large dollop of golden syrup from the slightly rusty-edged iconic green Tate & Lyle tin.

The shiny silver key in the blue box to our front door was largely symbolic as I had left home at 18 to start nursing. It wasn't even the first time I had had a key to this house. My Mum was the homeliest mother of all my friends. Our kitchen always smelled of something warm and welcoming such as steak and kidney pie, or Victoria sponge cakes oozing with jam. The neatly folded pile of freshly ironed clothes seemed to leave a particular aroma that felt like home. Then suddenly when I was 14, Mum announced she had got a job! She and Dad had never been able to afford a car so she went out to work, saving every penny she earned. Just when she thought there was enough to buy the car she realised that she hadn't calculated the cost of insurance so more of her wages were added until the little old yellow Ford Anglia could be ours.

I made a terrible fuss when Mum started work because I wouldn't be able to go home for lunch as I had done since I started school at 4, and horror of horrors I might have to stay for school dinners. I didn't though, as I spent my dinner money on two mini Cornish pasties and a semi-soft roll from Jones the Bakers on my way home, rarely bothering to go back to school in the afternoons as they only took the register in the morning.

Apparently I managed to lose my front door key the very first day Mum started her new job and she came home to find me forlornly sitting on the doorstep. Forty-nine and a half years after my 21st birthday I still have the silver key in the blue box as it has never left this house.