

My First Holiday.

In the 1940s holidays away from home were a rarity for most of us. Some families who were a little better off financially did take their children away for an annual holiday but for the remainder of us our only 'holiday' usually consisted of a day outing to somewhere like Wicksteed Park or a picnic at Coombe Hill which was always enjoyed by all of us.

I had left Dinton School and was now a junior in the senior school in Aylesbury and I still couldn't swim. In the previous summer holidays from school we would cycle or even walk to Mainsbridge in Cuddington to mess about in the water of the river Thame and as much as I tried I could not swim.

At school during the summer term we would walk from the school to the outdoor swimming pool in Aylesbury vale and receive swimming lessons. As we were young first years the whole class of boys and girls went together with the P.E. mistress who was extremely sympathetic to those who could not swim. She treated us most kindly but we all knew that when next year came this 'kindness' would stop! Boys would then be segregated from the girls so that when the boys went swimming the girls went to music lessons and vice versa. Our new swimming instructor would be a man whose methods for teaching non-swimmers differed greatly from our lovely lady teacher. We all knew what was to come and we certainly did not look forward to it. I was therefore quite desperate to learn to swim.

For me however a solution was about to be revealed. As my brother and sisters had now left school and were all working my parents announced that they would be taking me on holiday with them to Street in Somerset for a week to stay with my Uncle and Aunt. This was exciting as I had never been away from Dinton on holiday with my parents before and in a very short time we were on the train to London and at the end of a very long day we had arrived. The train journey was superb as there was so much to see along the way.

On reaching Street my Uncle told me about the large open-air swimming pool in the town which I could visit as many times as possible and as each day came I was there at opening time every morning. I knew no-one there but I also knew that I must learn to swim in that week. As lunch time arrived I dried and dressed and walked back. Each day Dad would ask me if I had managed it and he gave me words of encouragement when I said that I hadn't. When my last day at the pool arrived I was feeling a little downhearted but even more determined than ever and after a very short time my feet came off the bottom and I was swimming! I couldn't wait to see my parents so after swimming across the width of the pool I went back to them. Everyone was so pleased and I felt very relieved.

Not only did I learn to swim but we did have a day trip to Weston-Super-Mare and I did meet many of my cousins for the first time and on one afternoon my Uncle took me fishing. What he didn't tell me that we were fishing for eels. When he caught an eel and pulled it out of the water I thought that it was a snake as I'd never seen an eel before and I certainly didn't like snakes! I left the river bank in a hurry and there ended the days fishing!! One memory that has remained with me to this day that it was on this holiday that I saw my first yellow carnation. Previous to this time to me all carnations were white, pink or red but my Uncle was now growing yellow ones. They are very common today but in 1947 they were quite rare.

After a very enjoyable week we left Street and our new found relatives to retrace the long journey home. Although that was my first holiday away from Dinton that I would spend with my parents it would also prove to be the last.

When next summer arrived I did not have to line up with the non-swimmers but I did watch from 'a safe distance'! What a very valuable holiday last summer had proved to be and I did at least have a summer holiday with my parents which unfortunately my brother and sisters did not.

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