

The Holiday Job

Mr Gullick was a shy man; he was also a pharmacist. The little shop had been run by Mr Gullick's family for many years in the Cornish harbour town where I grew up – long before Boots arrived on the scene.

I worked in the shop during one of the summer holidays towards the end of my time at school. It was a fascinating experience.

At one end of the shop was a high counter, behind which was a bank of small wooden drawers. This was where prescriptions and medicines were kept, ready for collection. Hanging on the handle of one of the drawers were some small paper bags. I was instructed that this particular drawer contained 2 kinds of condoms. If a customer came in and wanted to buy some, I was to simply ask "3/6 or 3/9?" Although I understood their function, I had never encountered them personally and certainly had no idea what the difference in price signified. Luckily for me, such an enquiry was rare, although I did seem often to sell bottles of aspirins or combs, when a man entered the shop and saw a teenage girl behind the counter.

My favourite part of the shop was a glass case which housed a display of French perfumes. The names of Chanel, Dior, Hermes, Rochas and Givenchy were new to me, being more familiar with Goya, Grossmith and Coty. I was able to try the testers and decided there and then that once I could afford them, French perfume from one of the great fashion houses, was the way to go.

At the other end of the shop was another counter which dealt mainly with ladies' requirements – make-up, perfume and sanitary products. Discretion was the watchword in the shop as one of my regular jobs was to wrap boxes of tampons and the like in brown paper, so that a lady could be handed her chosen brand and place it amongst her other shopping unidentified. Such niceties seem extraordinary to us now.

I was also given the job sometimes of helping to make scented bath salts and then weigh them up ready for purchase. I had to mix in the different colours and scents and once packed, label the bags according to their type. They were a popular item.

Customers would also bring in their rolls of film to be developed and another of my jobs was to match up the negatives with the printed

photos and then label the paper wallet that contained them in a special box, where they were kept – alphabetically lined up – ready for collection.

Kathleen was the one permanent assistant in the shop. She was very friendly and helpful, taking me under her wing, and coming to my rescue more than once. She lived in Polruan on the other side of the harbour, so came to work each day on the ferry, unless rough weather prevented her journey.

I enjoyed my time there that summer and I learned a lot.

Jan Rees

July 2021