

RAF STONEY CROSS
Memories of Life at Longbeech
Mrs. P. Duncan

At the age of between 10 and 11 my parents were sent to the Air Force Camp at Stoney Cross to await being housed at Totton in one of the new Council houses. We lived in the Sergeants Mess for a year or two where my brother Michael was born. Whilst there my brother Christopher was drowned in one of the many open water tanks, later these were fenced off and wire netting put over the top. This was a very bad time for my mother who nearly had a breakdown.

Life was reasonably good for us children as we had the surrounding woods to play in, which did not please my mother very much as we would roam quietly for some time. Whilst there we had a shop installed, a Surgery twice a week, two bakers, Lowmans and Winters from Fritham, a chip van called twice a week, Thursday evening and Saturday lunchtime. There were pictures laid on and a dance once a week and a Sunday School, a Youth Club for the older kids, the Ice Cream van came round 3 or 4 times a day during the summer, Carlos and Whippy, two greengrocers, Elkins, and Ron White, 2 coalmen, Combs and Wrights of Totton. We had a coach trip to the seaside arranged by a Mrs. Tussle and friends, street parties and a bonfire and fireworks at the top of the airfield controlled by Firemen and Police, so in all it was fun.

In fact, for us children it was the happiest time we could have had and if it were possible, I would go back tomorrow. However, it was a hard time for my parents with the drowning of their son and with five other children to bring up. There was firing to collect, wood and fir cones to help keep the huts warm, and once a week concrete floors to wash and paint with floor paint. My Granny made us a rag mat to put on the floor for comfort. We had to walk to school at Minstead until a bus was arranged but this did not always turn up in bad weather and so again, we walked. We were a large family and so could not always afford the bus fare. We older ones later went to Bartley School at Cadnam so would walk the younger ones to Minstead then continue to Cadnam arriving sometimes as late as 9.30 or 10 am, but always got a mark as the headmaster always knew we would turn up at sometime.

It was a very healthy place as we spent quite a lot of time outdoors w3hen it was fine. We would collect wood and fir cones for the fire and my father used to cut up logs from fallen trees and we helped stack logs in the shed. We had no Post Office so again we had to walk to Minstead Post Office to collect the Family Allowance and more groceries and bread, which meant one of us older

ones, had to stay home to collect it. My mother was often in poor health, as she would go without often so that she could make ends meet. My father and us children came first with her. As I remember, my father was never out of work for as soon as one job closed, he would walk the streets to find another and often my mother never knew till later, sometimes he would walk for days to find work.

Things we would play were Hide & Seek, Tarzan, Cowboys & Indians and

making dens and in the evenings our parents and others would join in our games such as Skipping, Rounders and Chase and later they would chat together while we children played, many times until quite late. In the winter we stayed indoors and played Cards, Ludo, Snakes & Ladders, drawing or singing around the stove with hot buttered toast and mugs of cocoa.

Christmas time was very dear so we children would 'nick' a Christmas Tree from the copse nearby. One year we got a rather large tree, about 8 or 9 feet and Mother said we had to take it back as Daddy would be in trouble, but we cried so much that in the end Dad cut some off the bottom and we made decorations for it, this was the best Christmas we had. We also helped her get our Christmas present, but we did not realise it at the time, you see she would take one of us each week to Southampton to buy clothes and our present and we also helped pick out our sisters and brothers presents and carry them home. Do not laugh but there you are, children believed in Santa Claus then.

We went Blackberry picking, Blueberries, and mushrooms later. We were always picking flowers for my father, Daisies, Buttercups, Bluebells, Foxgloves, and many more which my mother always found a jam jar or broken cup to put them in. We also went on picnics and long walks with my mother as she always found time to spend with us if she could, even to join us in our play and would bring sandwiches and rock cakes and lemonade and we would eat them in our little den made in the fallen leavers. Sometimes we older ones would sneak away to the Golf Club near buy and 'nick' the players balls then meet them at the Club House later in the day and, if we were lucky, they would give us pennies or sixpence for them. Naughty I know but it was fun.

We went Carol singing at Christmas time in a large group with candles in jam jars on sticks and collect money which was shared out. This was a happy time as we visited pubs and big houses along the Southampton to Bournemouth Road. 'The Compton Arms' and 'The Dick Turpin' were two we would go to often and of course collect quite a lot of money, crisps and hot mince pies and arrive home tired and sleep in late which did not bother my mother.

After my brother's death we moved around a bit, to the top of the camp and later halfway down. We were the WORT family and were there for six years. We were rather timid and so were bullied quite a bit but would not change life there. Then at the age of 15 I left school and stayed at home to help my mother as she had another baby during our time there, my sister Josephine, and a stillborn child, which left my mother with kidney trouble. Then, as I was reaching sixteen, I got a job in one of the big houses along the Emery Down road, Charlford House. Major Hibberd lived there, and I went to live in as a Kitchen Help then later as a Nanny to their children. I was there for about a year before leaving to get married. I met my husband at Long Beach while he was visiting his sister Mrs. Moody. I went to live in Scotland and soon after my mother was rehoused at 8 Wingate Road, Calmore, Totton.

As I said earlier, this was the best time of our lives, although it was hard at times, and it broke my mother's heart when we had to leave, we had been

there so long. Life at Totton was not the same and unfriendly. We had the Deer Hounds and Fox Hounds come through the wood with the Huntsmen and my mother sheltered one deer in our shed as it was near collapse and sent the Huntsmen off on a wild goose chase while we kids went off with kippers to get the hounds off the scent and once we shut a fox in the copper house and let him out after they had gone. We children watched one day when the hounds pulled a deer down by the throat and tore it out while the Huntsmen sat on their horses and watched before shooting it. You should have heard the screams the deer made.

Some of the families I can recall include:

- Wareham,
- J Turners,
- Wheelers
- Whitchers
- Brooks
- Frampton
- Srooks Barnes
- Shreared
- Wiltshiner
- Penfold
- Soffe
- Holmes
- Lamb
- Broomfield
- Tussels
- Priors
- Tasstovines
- Bailyers
- Cargills
- Hewetts
- Wells
- Moodys
- Llwellyns
- Foxes

There was a chimney sweep Ted Splatt, a cake van, fresh fish van, papers delivered daily including Sundays, dustmen, and sewer men. Doctors were Danchey and Tucket and the Police patrolled at night.