

Not Allowed to eat Ice-Cream or Chips in School Uniform

Peggy Kunslik was born in 1927 and interviewed in 2008

I was evacuated from Newcastle to Kendal in 1939 at the start of the war. I was very excited.. We left Newcastle upon Tyne with a label round our necks with our name and address written on which I found very humiliating. We had to carry a gas mask with us and a suitcase with some clothes in. We got on a train in Newcastle and, when we eventually stopped, the train started going backwards and we all cheered because we thought we were going back home. Of course what had happened was that at Oxenholme another engine had to be put on to bring us down to Kendal station.

One or two ladies were going up and down speaking to children and giving them to adults and eventually they came to us. She put her hand on my shoulder and led us over to this little lady with a lovely sweet face. Then a man came up and said "Would you like a lift in a car?" My hostess said "No, no it's only across the road we'll walk." And he said "No, no I'll take you." So we got in the car and went round the block and ended up in Ann Street.

She had a lovely little house and she was quite house-proud. She said "I'm Gladys and you must call me that." In the house were four men, when they introduced themselves they spoke in a completely "foreign" language and I couldn't understand a word they said but they all smiled. Gladys then showed us our bedroom. It was a beautiful room except it only had one single bed which we realised it was the reason Gladys had asked for two small children. Then she gave us some cocoa and biscuits and sent us off to our shared bed.

I came from a very secure loving family and my mother arrived on the first Saturday to see if all was well. Gladys took us on the top of a double decker bus to Windermere. I'll never forget my first sight of the lake. I really couldn't believe there was anything so beautiful.

Before I was evacuated to Kendal I had been looking forward to going to this really lovely school in Heaton. It was really beautiful with big playing fields, tennis courts everything you could want. When we came here we were told we had to meet at the Roxy Cinema on Sandes Avenue. It was the smallest of the three cinemas that Kendal had at the time. We had to meet there for assembly. Miss Cooper, a little headmistress with silver hair. We sang a hymn, said a prayer and then she gave us a list of things we had to do. She said we had to remember that we had been sent to Kendal for safety and the good people of the town were very kind and were going to look after us and in return we had to make sure that we didn't cause any problems.

We were told we hadn't to eat ice cream, sweets or anything like chips in the street. We never had to walk more than two abreast on the pavement and if somebody was coming the other direction one had to step behind the other so they could get past. We always had to wear our hats when we were wearing our school uniform. If we broke any of those rules we got detention.

We had most of our lessons in the Engineers Room at the Allen Technical Institute next to the museum, so instead of having desks we had rough engineers' benches. That was where we had most of our lessons. We did have science drama and the gym lessons at the Girls' High School and we also went to the Boys Grammar School for swimming. I always remember the pool there it had a cement bottom.

Nothing had happened in Newcastle in 1940 so they said I could go home. So I said goodbye to Gladys and her husband Walter for the summer holiday and I was expecting to start my old school then the caretaker's house got a direct hit, so we all got our orders to come back. I was very fortunate that Gladys and Walter took me back.

When I came back to Kendal I joined the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association). The "YW" was the mecca for everything that went on. I went to an embroidery class there one night. I went to keep fit and ballroom dancing. This was when I was 14. I was only allowed to go on a Friday night to the ballroom dancing because it was all girls. Saturday night was mixed but only being 14 I was not allowed.

I also joined the Walking Club. Now you were supposed to be 16 years old but I asked Miss Bennet, who was the leader at the "YW" and she allowed me to go with them. I went up Helvellyn to see the sunrise which was wonderful I didn't see the sunrise 'cos it rained but I did see the glow-worms, the only time I have ever seen glow-worms.

Everything went on at the "YW," the whole social scene for young people. Oh and of course there was Tognarelli's on Stramongate. You could sit in sort of little compartments that held about four so you could meet your friends after school and have a good chat.

We used to have fish and chips from Hanratty's every Tuesday and I had to go straight from school which was quite a long run from there, stand in the queue, get the fish and chips, cross the road and catch the bus back. Walter worked at K Shoes and he used to come home for his lunch every day and he was on that bus and by the time he got home we only had half-an-hour.

When we finally moved back I missed Gladys and Walter. They had been very kind to me and they came every year for years and years tour home for a holiday and I came back here every year to see them. I missed the freedom I had in Kendal because although I was older I still didn't have the freedom I had there. But overall I was just glad to get home and go to my beautiful school even though I only had a few years there after that.

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