

THE FOURSOME'S SCHOOL LIFE

by Jacky Yong, Linda Woolfe, Sandra Drake and Ruth Steiner

On October 18th 1991, we as the foursome, Jacky Yong (nee Alick), Ruth Steiner (nee Spain), Sandra Drake (nee Cohen) and Linda Woolfe (nee Nabarro) made our effort to encounter in Victoria, London after we were last together since 1965. There we revived our memories recalling our past and we all jotted down on rough notes in order to contribute our joint article, especially for release of the publication in time of our first-ever reunion in May 1992.

Back to 1953, Jacqueline (called as Jacky) first came to school and Linda came shortly in the same year. Sandra came in 1956 following Ruth aged 8 who left her local hearing school in Southend. We usually treated Ruth like our "faithful servant" as she did not mind collecting the newspapers for Mr Benham, the headmaster and also buying some sweets for us at the tuck shop nearby. Her favourite sweet was Milk Gum.

Ruth was unsettled with her new school life and she cried a lot but soon she got it all over. She never forget her best "surprise" when she was allowed to go home for the weekend; she recalled being sent out of the dining room for refusing to eat particular food! Our class teacher, Miss Sansom was moody; we knew the "signal" when she wore her red dress. Also Miss Sansom got fed up with Ruth over the French lessons. One time, Miss Sansom, in her rare good mood, arranged something for us on April's Fool and she made us searching for vital clues in our "treasure game" before we were rewarded some sweets hidden around the tree on the school ground. She even fooled us with our hearing aids when we nodded pretending we were taking heed but in fact, she removed our batteries beforehand.

We never forget our experience in the dormitory; for an example, Janet Brewster, one of the girls, always chewed her gums then removed her gum to stick on her "screen" beside her bed and resumed chewing the same gum in the next morning. One of the girls became sick in the middle of night yelling for attention; the matron hurried to switch the light on but it did wake another girl, who got up to fetch a chair and began to remove her sheets, one by one folded into piles on the chair, without realising it was an early hour in the morning. What a funny sight it was! Sandra was once caught playing in her bed after she wanted to talk to other girl in bed while using her torch by the dark wall where other girls joined her. It happened in minutes when the suspicious matron came up to their bedroom before Sandra had no time to react and with haste, she hid the torch with light on inside her sheet. Obviously the matron knew what she was up to and poor Sandra was sent downstairs alone in the classroom; it was scary for her in the darkness with strange shadows.

Lots of dramas did happen in the dining room. We remember Mr Benham's annual birthday treat and he always gave us all the pieces of the birthday cake. There was one long candle for him to blow as Linda used to ask "Is he one year old again?" and he replied that the candle was long because he was a very tall man. Once there were extreme tempers flared up between Joshua Menczer and George Lehrer who suddenly pushed the table aside and grabbed the knives from the cutlery drawers. The whole quick action was very much like a glimpse of "western movie". Leon Lebor, one of the boys, warned all of us about the "peaches" that came from the sacks and not tins and there were thousands of ants inside the sacks. So we panicked and searched our dishes for

the ants for hours and hours but to meet his notorious joke, the matron forced to push his face down into his dish while he pretended to look for the ants; what a terrible funny sight he looked with squashed peaches all over his face!! Sandra and other girl named Sally Littleboy accidentally bumped each other by banging their heads then Sandra feeling pale went to faint onto the floor as her forehead was swollen like a large beachball and she was immediately taken to a surgery for her head injury which received an unusual treatment of sugar and butter!

We recollected our cookery lessons at Oak Lodge School, the next door and remembered the nice female teacher who showed us how to behave a proper lady having all the instructions to make tea and to serve the best cups and saucers with teapot and delicious homemade cakes to scoff up later!

One of the boys, Moshe Moshy, always bit his finger nails during the lessons. One day the teacher, Mr Denton who was fed up with him decided to cut his own finger nails and placed them on a drawn up paper in the shaped round plate with real cutlery to serve embarrassing Moshe while we all had a good laugh.

There older girls often called us "babies" though we were quite young and were not welcome to join them in the evenings at school. Feeling fed up, we took an idea to dress up ourselves in ridiculous clothes of "baby" fashion with socks and to comb our hair roughly with big bow and hairslides. You can imagine the look of the headmaster's face when he saw us lined up with others in the Assembly Hall. Being asked us why, we pointed out to the older girls and told him that they were the responsible cause of this.

Visiting dentist was most terrifying for us as we looked our name written on the blackboard for appointments. At the time, we did not have any anaesthetic for treatment. It was done with fillings from a horrible, drilling machine whirring way down that tortured each of us with the nurse holding our arms behind! Eye tests were held in the surgery. There an optician, a Mr Spiro gave each girl eyedrops for tests, and we could not see anything properly for the whole day. Our sight was so blurred and our view seemed to lose focus. We were all given glasses to use and wear at school. Linda was only one who dared to throw them away in the dustbin.

Every November, the school organised the firework displays on the ground and it was enjoyable to watch, except Ruth who was so nervous of the firework and was sent to stay in Mrs Benham's classroom while watching inside. Annually there was a school play where all parents and visitors came to watch in the school hall. In the show called "Joseph", one of the boys, Alan Murray acted as King Pharaoh and Linda was chosen to play as a dancing slave. To her embarrassment, her bikini top began to fall down to her waist while dancing in front of the whole audience and she quickly turned round to face towards "King Pharaoh" because she did not want to expose her bare chest in front of the public. No wonder, that night was on Shrove Tuesday, the Pancake Day and her breast must be as flat as the pancake!

We did decorate the dining room and assembly hall every Chanukah and remembered how we used to make colourful paper chains, etc. There were fun games; we crawled under the chairs stacked together to form a tunnel with sheets over us, to reach for our presents through a giant mouth with teeth (made of cardboards) opening and closing!

As result of misunderstanding in communication, Linda joined Jacky to stay at Jacky's house for the weekend, without Linda's mother's knowledge although Linda thought it was

okay. Soon after dinner, they retired to go to bed but to their surprise, their teacher had to come and drag Linda in her nightie back home to relieve her worried mother. After that, all was later sorted out following Linda's next stay at Jacky's house in safe and peace of mind.

For Yom Kippur, we all got up very late in the morning, missing our breakfast where other children aged 13 years below, fasted only half the day, whereas they had to put up with "all day" fasting and there were some non-Jewish children in the dining room eating food while smell from the kitchen was tempting. We were asked to take a long walk outside and we decided to travel to Leicester Square by tube then we had meal at Wimpey Bar in the dark. All was treated by Jacky. We returned to the school in the late noon to face the big meal to break the fast. What naughty of us as we were so full that we did not want to eat anything (maybe the matron thought we were on hunger strike!)

One summer, we were called by the headmaster at office and we were offered a holiday in Newhaven, Sussex where there was "Supa Super School". We enjoyed ourselves among the other new faces there during summer holiday. Then we were told to take a day trip to France by ship from Newhaven. Jacky being cautious with health concern warned us to take the "anti-seasick" tablets just in case the weather was awful and sea was rough. We obeyed her and took the tablets which helped us feel fine on the rolling, rocking ship which made many passengers sick and they might thought the deaf girls were miracles, thanks to Jacky.

We never forget that fateful day, probably saddest day of our school life during our headmaster's sudden death. Sandra being ill with cold and also suffered from skin allergy in her bed and was told by one of the cleaners who earlier heard of that bad news. Jacky happened to pop in to see Sandra upstairs and she was told by Sandra. With Jacky's silence, everybody was reported to gather into the Assembly Hall where the sad news broke. Ruth run off with full emotion.

Due to decline of incoming new pupils, it was inevitable that the school should be closed down and the children were allocated to Tottenham where new hostel was built at Talbot Road. At the end of our school year, we did not have to wear school uniform which was great because we hated to wear our brown knickers! One snag was that we had to wash up our dishes in absence of the kitchen helpers. The freedom was wonderful for us to learn. We moved to the former boys' dormitory and we could not use the outdoor swimming pool. Instead we went to the indoor pool in Balham. On the last week, we packed up everything in school and we visited Margate School for deaf children to deliver school furniture they bought from our school. We did swim in their swimming pool there. Our school matron, a German lady named Miss Eckbecca, who used to be rough and tough with us, unexpectedly turned to be an angel during our last day .. missing us so much? We, the girls, moved to stay at the hostel in Tottenham and went to Tottenham Deaf School in Philip Lane for lessons. We went to the hostel for about 10 minutes' walk and had our lovely lunch cooked by "Aunty" Alma, our good cook.

We were the last senior girls with the younger ones namely Maria Olsen, Mira Levy, Caroline Nabarro, Alex Olsen and few little ones. They may probably remember their last days well.