

THE BEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE

by Margarita Warburton

There was a long delay as the school bus stopped at the traffic lights and Iris began to make comparisons with her own youth. Her memories took her back to 1942 when, with 68 others from Glasgow Grammar School, she was evacuated to Milton Park, the Kirkcudbright hunting lodge of Lord and Lady Sinclair. Her thoughts were hardly nostalgic, as she had hated the regimented life there and missed her older brother. It was a single sex school and uniform was compulsory at all times, except Saturday evenings when they were permitted to wear the one dress they had been allowed to bring with them. The uniform consisted of a grey skirt, grey Viyella blouse, blue and silver tie, black lisle stockings and ugly, rubber-soled indoor shoes known as "ward shoes."

Iris sighed as she recalled the strict regimentation of their days, rising at 7.0 a.m. for breakfast at 8.0 am. Those on domestic duties set about their tasks, laying tables and preparing toast, a slow task without electric toasters. Breakfast consisted of a small bowl of cornflakes, two half slices of toast with margarine and marmalade and a cup of tea. After all meals girls were allocated to clear tables and wash up in the butler's pantry in a deep stone sink, filled only once with hot water and soap.

After breakfast they had to return to the dormitories to make their beds changing the sheets from top to bottom once a week. Baths were only once a week, with each girl allowed only ten minutes in five inches of water. Hair was washed by matron once a fortnight.

Classes were held in cold prefabricated units outside the main building and were followed by a rather inadequate lunch of poorly cooked food. After lunch, one hour was left for recreation before afternoon lessons. High tea followed before an evening session of prep. After a light supper of cocoa and bread and jam came their bedtime, strictly controlled according to age.

On Saturday mornings the girls sat in what had been a large drawing room, mending clothes and darning stockings whilst one of the teachers read to them. If they were unlucky the readings were from Dickens or Sir Walter Scott. After lunch the girls were marched in crocodile down to the village a mile away where they were given a short break to spend their sixpence pocket money, before playing badminton or hockey on the playing field. In the evening they wore their dresses and played organised party games in the school hall.

On Sundays they were once more marched down to the village to attend morning service at the Presbyterian church. After a dismal lunch of cold, fatty roast, boiled potatoes and beetroot, it was time to sit in the drawing room, under supervision, to write letters home. In the evening the Minister came up for a short service of hymns.

Iris realised that the bus was approaching her stop and prepared to get off. She wondered idly how any of the children travelling today would have coped with wartime conditions, the regimentation and the rationing. She hoped they would never have to.