

AN ORAL HISTORY OF LONDON'S HOLIDAY CAMPERS-SUMMARY INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWEE: Kim Dicker, nee Edgeworth

DATE OF BIRTH: 1956

BORN: Paddington

PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS: Father Ratings Officer, local Council, later Assistant Treasurer, Surrey County Council, Mother, book-keeper

INTERVIEWER: Simone Farr

SUMMARISER: Alison Brennan

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 16TH 2023

Kim's memories of Holiday Camps are humorously told with a lot of detail. She first went as a toddler in 1958. The family usually stayed at Croyde Bay in Devon, run by NALGO (the local government trade union). In the early years, facilities and food were basic. Kim took her own children to the Savoy Country Club, on the Isle of Wight, more upmarket. More recently she spent music-themed weekends at Potters, Lowestoft and Hayling Island. The best things about holiday camps were the friendships, fun, and being relaxed as a family. The lawns, flower beds and white pebble-dashed chalets of Croyde were magical. Children had lots to do, loads of choices; Later on, as a parent, it was great knowing her children were happy.

Her father was three times "Mr Nalgo, her mother once "Miss Nalgo," elected by the campers, to lead a committee devising entertainments. Once her father got the job because he won the hairiest chest competition. One evening, for a joke, he kept nicking the ladies' hats, (part of the props for a game), and after disqualification, was eventually awarded a lollipop.

On arrival, the family picked-up friendships from previous years. Each camper was given a camp name, for privacy, Kim thinks, and to level up Council ranks. Her parents were Oxo and Bisto. Kim's family also got to know staff. The entertainments organizer was usually called "Sporty."

Activities varied with age-as a tiny she went to the teddy bears' picnic, for walks with the nurse, played in the sandpit. When older, she did putting and clock-golf, went in for tournaments, taken seriously. Her teenage boyfriend wasn't available until he was knocked out of the tennis tournament. The beautiful Croyde Bay beach was for sunny days. At thirteen she went to her first beach party: big bonfire, guitar playing, beer and snacks. Unknown to Kim, her parents stole out to keep an eye. There were chalet parties and lots probably went on! There was teenage romance for her at the Camps, nothing serious. It wasn't easy to keep relationships going when people lived at a distance.

The evening began with a children's ballroom dance. Later she would drag adults up to dance. Sports Day also big feature; the 3-legged race, sack race, and lots of injuries, people went to the medical centre. There wasn't the same consciousness of Health and Safety. She was left alone in the chalet when her parents went to the evening entertainment. A handkerchief tied to the door signalled her presence to the Child Patrol, who alerted parents to crying children via the show's compere. Something that wouldn't happen today! The camp was felt to be safe and Kim and other children spent all day with adults other than her parents.

In the early years each chalet had just a toilet and washbasin. Campers queued from 4pm for one of two camp baths. Food was also basic -Kim's mother said "ropey". Things were regimented. "There was nothing to be gained by being a rebel!" Meals served at set times, no choice, trestle tables. Before they ate, campers sang a song: "Always eat when you're hungry..." Latecomers got a forfeit. "Wakey-Wakey" men, whom teenage Kim resented, banged dustbin lids to ensure breakfast punctuality. At the end of the evening, campers sang, "Goodnight Campers..wash your dirty faces, don't sleep in your braces!" When this song was not sung at Savoy Country Club, campers protested so it was re-instated.

Later on at Croyde, facilities were upgraded, a bar and swimming pool provided, and food improved. Kim's children loved the Savoy and her daughter marked off the days until their return. Kim celebrated her 25th Wedding Anniversary at the Savoy, a very special time.

Kim prefers to do her own thing now. She wouldn't want the whole holiday camp experience, the regimentation and mealtime rules, but she would choose the friendship. She has occasionally gone on cruises and thought the entertainment, and sociability were similar.