

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

INTERVIEWEE: Linda Hufford

DATE OF BIRTH: 1942

BORN: Southgate, London

PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS: Mother, Secretary and Dress-Maker, Father, Maintenance Engineer, Post Office, later for a time her parents ran a sweet shop

INTERVIEWER: Daniel Kemp

SUMMARISER: Alison Brennan

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 16TH 2023

Linda recounted happy times at holiday camps in the wider context of family, friendships and school life. As a child, her mother had holidays at the seaside, but her father from a more poverty-stricken background didn't. Before they married in the nineteen thirties, her parents went to a holiday camp, probably in a wider family group. As a young man Linda's father went to North Africa, something that would have been unusual. Her parents went to Northern Spain together. Her mother wasn't keen after she saw a man urinating in the street.

Linda went regularly to holiday camps between the ages of 3 and 6, in the late 1940s when holiday camps were re-starting after the WW2. The group consisted normally of her Mum, Dad, sister, aunt and cousin, sometimes her Grandma. They were close-knit and stayed together. Usually, they went to a smaller camp on the East Coast, (Linda doesn't recall the name) as her Mum thought Butlins too big. Once they travelled precariously to an Isle of Wight camp in a small boat, and later on her parents went to Butlins Hotel at Saltdean. While her parents ran the sweetshop, the family did not go away for holidays (from when Linda was six, till early in secondary school). They didn't discuss holidays with neighbours in Southgate, so Linda doesn't know if they went to holiday camps.

As she lived in a leafy green suburb Linda wasn't particularly struck by the green, spacious environment, which was normal to her. The accommodation was basic, very clean, probably less facilities than at home. They never self-catered, going for meals in the huge dining room, served by waitresses. The food was similar to home, no spaghetti or curry, and, Linda thinks, no choices. The atmosphere was noisy but nice, no arguing.

The days were very busy, and Linda felt safe to take part in activities away from her parents. Most things happened round the pool. A stand-out memory for Linda is winning the Fancy Dress Competition as Princess Elizabeth. Her cousin went as a bridesmaid. Linda's mother spent all week making the costumes and some campers resented that she'd taken so much trouble! One year, her cousin went as Prince Charming wearing her Grandmother's bloomers. Linda's father won a cross-dressing competition, as a dreadful looking woman.

They didn't go outside the camp, or to the beach, as there was enough going on. When they went on rambles, her father entertained and chivvied people up. They usually became friends with another family, but this normally didn't last beyond the holiday. The campers were like them - working-class people - and it felt comfortable. Linda's parents made friends with the entertainers, who were like Butlins' redcoats. They were busy all day long and it must have been hard work. After the evening meal there was dancing and entertainment, organised by the redcoat types. No single act stands out. She thinks there were singing and talent competitions. The evening ended with the singing of "Goodnight, Campers," so everyone went to bed at the same time.

Butlins Hotel, Saltdean, had better food and accommodation but it was less lively. The family went to evening entertainment and out for drives. When it rained, they stayed indoors for activities. Later on, they went abroad, and Linda took her own family self-catering in England, then to Cyprus and America (Disneyland). After Linda's husband died she organised her own trips abroad. Linda's daughter went to a holiday camp "Under Forties Weekend" in Devon, 20 years ago - pretty terrible, with mature ladies preying on younger men!

The best things about holiday camps were being busy all day and being with other children. Very happy times and memories.