

Early Memories of School – early 1950s

My brother and I were brought up in Essex, first living in Harold Wood. I began school full time aged three years and ten months. My older brother, eighteen months older, was at the school and he took me there every day. This entailed a mile long walk to the bus stop, four miles on the bus through countryside and a walk from the bus stop to the dame school. Alternatively we would walk a shorter distance to the station from home, one stop on the train and a long uphill walk to the school. School began at 9am and finished at 4pm. During lunch time we played outside on the concreted back garden of the dame school which was in a large Victorian town house and run by two very elderly spinsters. It was their aim to get every boy into the Brentwood prep school and every girl into the High School or Ursuline Convent, having passed both their entrance exams and the 11+.

My older brother when aged seven went to the Prep school and I continued to travel alone to and from school. A year later when my younger brother aged four began school I took him by bus or train on the same daily journey.

Two years later the elderly spinsters now in their nineties retired and we went to a school in Gidea Park. By this time we had a family car and my mother learnt to drive. As several families had children at this small private school we had the luxury of being driven, sharing the journey with other parents until we moved house six miles further away. My younger brother went to Brentwood Prep school by bus and by then, aged nine, I travelled to Gidea Park by train. After the 11+, when at the Convent, I walked to school, a five mile round trip and a few years later, travelling by bike.

We learnt independence and endurance from a very early age!