

Museum of Youth

Anne Cooper : born in 1936 in the village of Rothley, Leicestershire.

During World War II, we had no central heating and I do remember feeling very cold. We were lucky with food as father grew vegetables and the farm next door helped with dairy produce – once, we kept a pig which my parents salted, cured and cooked. I often used to dream of eating cream cakes which I had tasted before war broke out.

We had evacuee London teachers living with us for several years and one left her bike for me as I hadn't got one. My mother made me a doll and dressed it with scraps from her petticoats – a disappointment, as I wanted a china doll. I liked listening to the radio and remember hearing Churchill's reassuring voice.

At school, we had gas masks; Mickey Mouse ones for the juniors and plain but gruesome looking ones for the older children. When bananas and other tropical fruits became available, there was huge excitement. I can remember the thrill of tasting grapefruit and peaches for the first time.

The games we played in the streets and playgrounds were skipping games, whips and tops, marbles, ball games, rounders, 'The farmer wants a wife', 'Oranges and lemons', 'Mr. Wolf', and 'British bulldog.' The annual fair was a highlight of the year.

After the war, I went to boarding school and times were still frugal. Sweets were rationed. A red line around the baths allowed us 5 inches of hot water once a week and our hair was washed every 3 weeks! We had to 'strip-wash' 3 times a day using jugs and basins in the dormitories and we had to do PE outside, all weathers before breakfast! The school was run by ex military women. No phone contact with home – just a weekly letter.

After school in the 1950s, I went to Loughborough Art School to study fashion and it was liberating: coffee bars, college dances, traditional jazz clubs and the yearly college Rag Week blew away the gloom of the war years.

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