

My Memories of Lanfranc and the Austria school holiday 1961.

I was born in a nursing home near Mayday hospital Croydon in May 1948 during a heat wave, so my mother told me. I was the first and what turned out to be the only child to Jessie and Stanley Cooke. We lived in half a house which my parents rented. It was in one of the many quiet residential streets that had sprung up around Thornton Heath station and clock tower in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Although we only had half of it, the ground floor and garden, it was quite a large so we had plenty of room. My father worked for R. H. Dawes, a local builder's merchant and my mother was a dressmaker by trade, she took in sewing to do at home. This she collected from what was known as "the blouse house" which was a dressmaker's in Adiscombe. Some of my earliest memories are going to Adiscombe with my mother on the bus and trolley bus to collect the work. Although my parents were very much working class, they were careful with money so we seemed to live quite a comfortable, happy life. In 1952 my father bought a television which had a huge wooden cabinet and a tiny nine inch screen, just before the coronation in 1953 he bought an enlarger, which was just a big magnifying glass, I remember on the day of the coronation the house was full of people huddled together watching the TV.

I had started school just before the coronation at Beulah Infants, it was only about five minutes walk from the house, so after the first few occasions being taken by my mother I was left to my own devices to get myself to and from school, as was everybody else. When I was seven years old I moved to Beulah junior school. I think that I was a fairly average student and school life was quite uneventful. My father bought a car around this time, a pre war Morris eight, we used to the south coast every year for our summer holiday, there was never any thought of going abroad in those days.

Beulah school was quite progressive for its day, every year there was a school trip to some exotic destination and in 1958 it was to Boppard in Germany. Late in 1957 we took letters home to our parents giving details of the trip. It cost £20 and included an overnight stay in Brussels with a day at the world fair. My parents agreed to let me go on this trip and in the May of 1958, shortly after my tenth birthday, we set off by boat and train on my first visit abroad. I think I found the experience quite overwhelming at that young age as it was only 13 years after the end of the war!

In 1959 it was time for the 11 plus, which I managed to miss due to a bout of flu, I sat a couple of weeks later in the medical room with another boy, John Moyce. The other boys were told not to talk about the questions, which of course they did. But somehow I still managed to fail. That summer I went on my last school trip with Beulah, to the Isle of Man.

In the September of 1959 I started at Lanfranc, 2 weeks latter than everybody else again due to illness. Later that year Letters were taken home with details of a holiday in Switzerland, My parents said that I could go if I'd wanted to but I decided not to as I didn't know many of the boys that were going very well. Most of my friends were still from my days at Beulah. In the September of 1960 we had changed classes from Mr. Tarn to Mr. Mearns, also the teachers for individual subjects changed. For Geography we now had Mr. Beacham. This was one of my favourite lessons, not just because geography was not too taxing a subject but also of Mr. Beachams personality. Most the teachers at Lanfranc at that time appeared to be fairly ancient but Mr. Beacham had youthfulness about him. He had the look of Buddy Holly, who was my favourite pop star at that time. I had just bough my fist LP. "The Buddy Holly Storey Vol. 2" and I thought that Mr. Beacham was the 'spit' of Holly's picture on the cover. In the adjoining classroom was Mr Hemmings who tort English. He and Mr. Beacham seamed to get on well. One of their favourite punishments was to have the connecting door to the classrooms open Mr. Hemmings would stand in his classroom , Mr. Beacham in his, each would have a slipper, the "naughty boy" would then have to run between the two, bend over and have a whack with the slipper. This, of course, was more embarrassing than painful. It made for great entertainment for the rest of the class. Both teachers, especially Mr. Beacham were very well liked.

Letters were taken home again regarding two school trips the following year, one to Austria in May, whilst the other was to Norway in August, as the latter involved flying, which was something I had never done, when my parents told me that I could go on one trip I opted for the Norway holiday. This holiday was mainly reserved for the senior part of the school, but as not all of the places were taken up there were a few spaces for the rest of the school. As far as I remember we could pay for the holiday weekly. I think I paid ten shillings a week. This was taken up to Mr Budd, who was a science teacher, we had a card which he filled in with the amount paid, date and signed it. After a couple of weeks a lot of my class mates had decided to go on the Austria trip and although I new some of the boys in the third year who were going to Norway I didn't think I wanted to spend a holiday with them.

My friend Graham Allen and I used to cycle home together via Thornton Heath rec. as did two or three of these 3rd. years, John Phelps, David Gore and Reg Chapel. We usually had a bit of a Laugh with them on the way, we would be a bit cheeky towards them but they never retaliated. They seemed to be really nice boys but a year's difference at that age is a huge gap. Sometimes I would cycle home via Thornton Heath pond, I remember having a race with Gregory 'Eggy' Allen, he had a heavy old bike with rod brakes but he managed to keep up with me on my newish racer. We were not really friends but we got on well, he was quite a laugh. Alan Lee I didn't really know at all, I remember him as a fairly quiet boy.

I told my parents that I had made a mistake in choosing Norway. They said that I should have a word with Mr. Budd, which I did the next time I paid in some money. I asked him if I could change to the Austrian holiday because my friends were going on that trip. I remember my disappointment when he said that a few people had changed their mind so he wasn't sure if I would be able to. It was the following week when he said that I would be able to go to Austria as someone else wanted to go to Norway.

Life carried on, I don't think I thought much more about the holidays until May. We all gathered at East Croydon station had our photo taken by someone from The Croydon Advertiser and boarded the train for the coast. I don't recall which crossing we made. There was great excitement as we boarded the ferry, quite a few of the boys hadn't been abroad before. Being a seasoned traveller myself, the trip to Germany 3 years earlier, I was able to give them the benefit of my experience.

The two people I hung around with were Doug Kerr and Mick Cantwell. We were at an age when girls had started to become interesting to us. There was a party of girls on the boat from a school somewhere in the North, which in those days seemed just about as foreign as Europe did. One of the girls took a shine to Doug and she nicknamed him 'Cuddles', which of course stuck throughout the holiday. After disembarking we boarded a train to Basle. As most of the journey would be at night there was an option to travel by couchette at an additional cost, Doug had taken this option. Mick and I along with others had to try and get some sleep on the hard seats, and some of us even tried the luggage racks. We arrived at Basle station just as dawn was breaking. We had breakfast in the station buffet, then we were taken for a walk around Basle because we had about two hours to kill before our train to Rattenburg. Basle station seemed an exciting place even at six o'clock on a grey morning. Eventually we all arrived in Rattenburg. Our hotel was in a small hamlet called Radfeld, about a mile from Rattenburg. We walked to the hotel only to be told when we got there that they had overbooked and there was not enough room for all of us. It was decided by Messrs Beacham & Budd that those who had paid the extra for a couchette would stay there and the rest would stay at another a little way down the road. So we picked up our bags and started walking again. The area was very rural, fields and the odd farm. Eventually we came to our "hotel" It was typical of the area, a large Swiss chalet type building, lots of timber, a shallow sloping roof and balconies along the front and very shabby. We entered the hotel, at the far end of a long corridor was an open door with a cow poking its head through, the rear of the building was a cow shed! We had a room at the front. It was a bit like a dormitory, there must have been 7 or eight of us in the room. I don't recall any furniture in the room other than the metal bedsteads. We had to trek to the other hotel for all of our meals. We were told that this would only be for a few days and as soon as there was space we would all move.

There were quite a few staff from the school but the only ones I remember were Mr. Beacham, Mr. Budd and Mr. Barlow. I believe Mr. Budds wife & son were there and also Mr. Beachams mother. We would be off on trips nearly every day then back to our 'cow shed' in the evening. After a few days we got quite used to the old place. There wasn't a lot of damage that could be done so we had rather a lot of freedom. After a while we were told that we could move in to the main hotel but some of us said that we would rather stay where we were. So a few of us, together with Mr. Barlow, who was given the task of supervising us stayed put.

The holiday drew to a close and after another long and uncomfortable journey by train we arrived home, a lot older and wiser than the ten days we were away, I don't know about the rest but all of us 'cowsheders' had a really great time.

Eventually the summer holidays arrived, my parents and I were going on holiday to Dorset sometime around the middle of August. On the 9th August my mother said that her and I could go to the pictures, 1001 Dalmatians was playing at the Granada, Thornton Heath Pond. We decided to go to the middle performance which would have been around 5-30. We both enjoyed the film and caught the bus from the pond to the clock tower. We arrived home and as always at that time of the evening my Dad was watching the news. I remember that there was a brief item about a plane that had gone missing en route to Norway, no other details were given other than there was an all male party on board. After I had transferred to the Austrian holiday I hadn't given the trip to Norway another thought so on hearing this news item I didn't connect the two. The first thing I remember the following morning was my mother coming in to my bedroom in tears. I remember thinking that something must have happened to my Dad. I asked her what was wrong, she asked me if I remembered the news item from the previous evening and that it was the boys from Lanfranc school. I got up and dressed, then didn't know what to do; there was this strange heavy atmosphere. People were out in the street in small groups talking, trying to take in what had happened. In those days communities were much closer and everyone seemed to know someone who was on the plane. A little later on that morning my friend Mick Cantwell came round, we had arranged to go to London that day. My mother said that we should go as there was no point in hanging around at home. I remembered a story Mr. Beacham had told us one day in geography, about the time his grand mother had died when he was a teenager. He had gone for a ride on his bike after hearing the news and when he got back he received a stern telling off from his mother for not showing respect. His point was that just because he had gone out on his bike didn't mean that he wasn't sad and upset that his grand mother had died and that people react to things in different ways. I can't remember why he told us this storey but it is something

I never forgot. And this story became all the more poignant with the events of the ninth. With this thought in mind Mick and I decided we should go to London. I recall as the day went on what had happened had started to sink in. We didn't know how to deal with it, I even remember at one we tried to be jokey about it. Towards the end of the day we felt very down and gloomy about thing and decided to go home. It was sometime later when my mother said that it could have been me on that plane that I realised for the first time that death could happen to anyone at any time and that one day it would be my time. Although life went on, there was a dark cloud over Croydon everyone you met seemed to be preoccupied with what had happened. A friend of mine who went to Stanley Tech. was taking his cycling proficiency test which was held at Lanfranc school. He says that what stayed in his mind was the procession of family s and friends in tears coming to the school, also journalists from every newspaper.

The day of the Funeral my mother and I went to Mitcham Road and stood with the thousands of people as it passed. When we went back to school in the September we had an assembly Mr. Fowle took the assembly and I think the Bishop of Croydon was there. I don't' remember much about it other than at the end it was about thinking about the future and moving on.

As it was in those days there was never any mention of how we were feeling or if we were affected by what had happened especially those of us who' s change of mind had saved their lives but had resulted in others loosing theirs.

I flew for the first time in 1969, a package holiday to Spain with some friends I didn't

Think much about the flight in fact I remember quite enjoying it, even when we ran in to an electric storm over the Pyrenees and it got very bumpy. In the mid seventy's I became friendly with Ian Brown, his brother Geoffrey died in the crash. Ian still lived in the family home where he and his brother had grown up. His parents had moved away. His brother's bedroom had apparently been left un touched since his death.

I flew a number of times during the seventies, without any problems in the beginning but, it must have been in the early 1980's, I began to get apprehensive about flying, I kept thinking that I had somehow cheated my fate once but eventually it would catch up with me. Quite irrational but it gradually got worse until I had a bad panic attack on a flight back from New York in 1989. I have never flown since.