

FIVE STAR HOTEL

by Peter Szewshuk

When I got off the train at Birchington I was greeted by Mr Skardon (the music teacher). I thought how lovely and sunny it was compared to the dark clouds and rain in the north of England where I came from.

He drove us by van to the homes where I was greeted by Mr and Mrs Adderson and Mr Grenop, and I think we met Peter Johnson, the homes secretary, at the gates. Then we were taken to Mr and Mrs Macpherson's house called "Waterbeach". I had tea with the rest of the children, then I was taken to my dormitory where we said our prayers and went to bed.

We were got up at 6.30 am by Mr Mac coming into our bedrooms, opening windows to let the air in, whatever the weather. We all had a wash, and got dressed. Then we all had our housework to do, while Graham Macpherson (Mr Mac's younger son) did his paper round before breakfast. I often heard Mr Mac shout out,

"You have got two minutes before prayers."

(These were prayers and a Bible reading that were always taken in the quiet room.)

"Breakfast will on the table in 10 minutes!"

We always said grace and it was always a 3 course breakfast. Starting with cereal, then sausages on toast or eggs on toast, etc, and it was always finished with toast, butter and marmalade and tea.

Sometimes Mr Adderson's chocolate Labrador called "Cubby" would join us for a sausage breakfast, with Paddy the cat, Bunty their toy poodle and their budgerigar called Joey. Then Raymond Macpherson (Mr Mac's elder son) would go to St George's School (in Broadstairs) on his motorbike. We then cleaned the dining room, washed up and polished our shoes. Then we ran to school (I went to Park Lane here and then to King Ethelbert schools). We came back at noon for a cooked dinner and sweet and then we went off to school again. Then we came back at 4 pm for tea.

The highlight of the day was play time, then it was supper at 6 pm. Then we had a strip wash or a bath and then we were ready for bed. I thought it was a better dinner and tea service than a Five Star Hotel. I can never ever remember there being any hiccups in the daily routine and the cooks were marvellous, hard working ladies.

One of the old traditions of the home was to send a new-comer on a wild goose chase, looking for a 'left-handed screw driver'. I also remember Mr Adderson once imposing a curfew between 5 and 6 pm. We also had prize giving in the sports pavilion every year. Mrs Macpherson kept her piano in the quiet room, where she would play it and sing some of the old songs from the 1920s – 'Daisy, Daisy' and 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag' and other songs.

I played for the football team and the cricket team. On Saturdays we played cricket and football against other schools in Kent and we had a very good football and cricket team. On Sundays we all went to church twice and we always had a roast dinner. Then we went on our Sunday afternoon walk and came back to a high cream tea.

On Wednesdays we always went to Chapel, where I was in the choir. I also helped Mr Mac clean and polish the chapel. The first weekend of the month I always stayed at Mr and Mrs Everall's house, 21 Epple Bay Road, with their children Mike and Gill. I also stayed there for the 7 week school summer holidays. Mrs Everall was also assistant matron at the homes for some time and she worked with Mrs Adderson. I also stayed with Douglas Messent of 320, Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, London, who was a good friend and a great advocate of the homes.

One night in the summer of 1965, Mr Mac and I walked the great 50 mile Kent Messenger walk from Margate to Maidstone barracks on the hill. I thought it was a great achievement for a man who lost a leg in the Second World War.

Also one year I was the head boy and Barbara Partridge was the head girl. Together we went to London with Mr Adderson to visit and examine Charles Haddon Spurgeon's grave for any defects. Then we had a day out at the London Zoo.

I also think that Mr and Mrs Mac liked working in the homes, because Mr Mac always said that this was not a job but a vocation, and Mrs Mac used to tell the children that they were privileged to be in the homes.

I was in all Mr Adderson's theatrical productions. The first one was a play of mime called "The Breath of Spring" that we enacted in the Central Hall, Westminster. We had a famous organist and a couple of compères from the BBC to help us out that year. It was a full house with no standing room. David Myres and I were the narrators in the play and I remember when we both whistled a tune we made the audience laugh. I was also in the play about Charles Haddon Spurgeon that depicted the inception of Spurgeon's Homes and the legacy. I played the part of a trustee and Raymond Macpherson played the part of the Great man himself, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. If you look at the old photograph of this play, you will see that Raymond looked the spitting image of Mr Spurgeon. Also Graham Macpherson acted with his brother and played one of the trustees. This particular play was enacted at Westminster and Margate Winter Gardens. The high-light of the Spurgeon reunions was always the lift joke and the three buttons in the lift, by which we had the honour of being entertained by the then Chairman of the homes, Mr Arnold Clark. Mr Clark once said when he walked through the gates of Spurgeon's Homes in Birchington-on-Sea, he would purr.

But I do think the homes were kept in a very neat and tidy condition, especially the gardens. Also another well known trustee was Mr Vincent, who had a strawberry farm. Every year we were invited to pick strawberries there

and have a swim in his swimming pool. Then we went to his house for a strawberry cream tea – happy days indeed.

All in all, I think everybody would agree with me that there was never a dull moment in the homes and we were all kept well occupied; and well looked after. Dr Bowie gave us a medical every six months. We also saw Mr Beard the dentist every six months as well. For cuts and grazes we went to see the nurse at our famous white sick bay.

When we left the homes, we were all given a suitcase and a suit of clothes and a Bible. We all met and said good bye to the homes' trustees. Then we did our rounds and said good bye to all the house parents in the homes as well. Then we were sent into the big wide world to earn a living. Well, that is another long story.