

Memory gems in the Evacuee Play Trove

Despite the length of time that has elapsed since World War II, the precious memories that have been unearthed during our work with former evacuees show that their memories are alive with detail and sometimes very raw.

“We’d pick up things around the room to play ‘shops’ with, using buttons as money. I remember playing with a whip and top. We’d draw pictures with chalk on the pavement. We were always skipping – you didn’t have a skipping rope, it would just be a piece of old rope or even string sometimes. The boys played marbles.”

Hazel, Play Trove Volunteer

“We didn’t have many toys. I remember flat paper dolls which you could dress with cut-out clothes with tabs you would bend over, from a magazine.”

Stella, Play Trove Volunteer



“We used to hear the air-raid siren and we’d rush down the Anderson shelter. It was very claustrophobic. Mum used to count us in. On this occasion, she said “One’s missing” - it was me. Dad rushed back into the house. I was asleep on the bare floor under the table which I used to stay under so that I would be with the rest of the family. They were all waiting in the shelter. Dad scooted me out in a panic and I got cut on the leg as he pushed me into the shelter. I’ve still got the scar.”

Hazel, Play Trove Volunteer

“I was a nervous child, not very adventurous. We played Diablo, did skipping. We had no proper skipping rope, so you just found some old rope lying around, tied it up and had fun with it!”

Lillian, Play Trove Volunteer

“We used to play ‘Topsies’. Two people would play at a time – you would flick cigarette cards against the wall and if your cigarette card covered someone else’s, you won it. You didn’t collect the cigarette cards one by one, you could buy packs of them. There was also ‘Flicks’ which was a similar game.”

“I remember standing on the platform with John and my ticket, a gas mask and a little bag. How scruffy I must have looked – I remember I had holes in my shoes. Some children were taken off the train on the way, but the group of us left, got out at Bideford in Devon where there was someone to meet us. We were taken to a hall. I was very anxious – wondering what’s going to happen to us now?”

Ronald, Play Trove Volunteer



“We used to play ‘pretend’ games. I had a doll’s house which my Grandfather made for me. It had four rooms, two up and two down, and he made everything to go in it as well. Even a bathroom!”

“We used to tuck yer skirt in yer knickers and do handstands up the wall.”

“I had a horrible time as an evacuee. We were treated like cattle. The lady who took us in used to lock the door and beat us with a long cane. My sister came back home with a stammer, that’s how shaken up she was about the whole thing.”

Freida, Play Trove Volunteer

“We were poor – we’d put our coats on the bed as there were no sheets. I remember there was a man who delivered Pop from a van. You could collect empty bottles and you’d get a penny back on return – it was a way of making a little bit of money”

Sylvia, Play Trove Volunteer

“You played different games in the countryside compared to children in the towns. We used to play in the streets when we came back to Fulham, in the countryside we enjoyed playing on the haystacks in the field. Mum used to say to us “No playing on the haystack today” – all the hay would get into our clothes and hair. The boys from Fulham, who were evacuated with us, used to climb right to the top of the haystack and tip us off the hay!”

Diane, Play Trove Volunteer, 2013



“Knock-down Ginger was another favourite game, but mainly in Fulham. We would tie some string around the door handles of our mothers, so all doors were connected, knock on them, and then watch the confusion as everyone tried to open their doors at the same time! They knew it was us; they would shout “I’ll get you!”

“When we arrived in Tonypandy, Wales, we were herded into the village hall and

the locals picked the ones they wanted to come and live with them. It was like we were cattle. A man came up to us and said he would take me home with my brother – but my brother suddenly piped up and said he didn’t want to live with me! The man didn’t care, so he took me and left my brother behind to be chosen by someone else. I never let my brother forget what he did to me that day – right up until his death last year! He was a naughty boy back then; he must’ve broken every single window in the village when we were evacuees. He was living at the top of our road; I was living at the bottom.”

Jean, Play Trove Volunteer

“Mum used to take us for walks in Kensington Gardens or Wimbledon Common. We used to take half a dozen other children with us; they were all children who lived in our flats. When we were playing in Fulham, sometimes a couple of the Mums would come out and hold the skipping rope for us. They would be looking out the windows at us as we played as there was no TV for them to watch. Watching children play was classed as entertainment! It really was a wonderful childhood.”

June, Play Trove Volunteer

“We used to get gobstoppers, play marbles in gutter and flick (cigarette) cards. We played snap. Then at Passover we used to get a Matzo box, make a hole at one end of it and throw nuts, like hazelnuts, into the box as a game. Doesn’t sound like much but we had more than they get now. And there was ‘kiss chase’ and skipping.”

“We had no money – we were very very poor. I remember I won a 1st prize for singing ‘The Lord Is My Shepherd’. I was given a doll. It was lovely. It was made of china and had moving eyes, blonde hair and old-fashioned clothes (sort-of Victorian). But then, my male cousin was ill and wanted to play with it. My mother let him and he broke it – smashed on the floor. I was broken-hearted.”

Renee, Play Trove Volunteer

“You never see children with a whip and top nowadays – and spinning tops and we played hopscotch. We played with conkers; I used to pinch my Dad’s boot laces for the string. We played marbles and Knock-down Ginger. We’d talk to each other by linking one tin can to another with string – like being on the telephone! We’d flick cards against wall and knock them down. You could play in the middle of the road – there were no cars.”

Dina, Play Trove Volunteer



“We played outside much more, chasing around, playing “He” and hide and seek and climbing trees and ‘scrumping’ apples (until a policeman turned up and gave us a ‘clip round the ‘ear’ole’!) We had whip and top. My first bike was a boy’s bike. I had a home-made scooter – you always made your own. We used bottle tops to make a pattern on the sides. Box carts were magical. We all had skates. [We went] tobogganing on tin trays.”

Maureen, Play Trove Volunteer