

Toot Hill Secondary Modern School Bingham, Notts.

Jim Arnold

In September, 1954, my sister Lynda and I entered Toot Hill Secondary Modern School in Bingham as the first and only Canadians from the air base at Langar. We were perhaps better known at the school as the 'Canadian twins'. Several other Canadians joined us the following year. We were part of the Royal Canadian Air force (RCAF) personnel at Langar air base during the mid 1950s. RCAF Langar was a materiel supply base to the four Canadian Fighter Wings in France and Germany, contributing to NATO during the early years of the Cold War. We were at Langar for three years, 1954 – 1957: the first two years we attended Toot Hill; the third year we attended school at Radcliffe, where permanent married quarters were built for Canadian Air Force personnel.

We were bussed to school in Bingham along with other students from Barnston, Cropwell Bishop and other surrounding towns. We had a hot lunch each day at school in a Quonset hut, with a serving kitchen at one end and tables for students and faculty in the main section. One day at lunch, I tapped my spoon on the table to remove some water. The room fell silent and the Headmaster, Mr. Collins asked: "Mr. Arnold, do you wish to address the assembly?". Howls of laughter ensued. I was also part of the Morris Dancing team, which practiced in that same hut.

I was also the only Canadian to play on the school football team (they kept me out of their way by playing me at outside right!). I also participated in cross country runs at the school: the course took us by a farmer's field of peas, where we stopped to eat them until the last man ran by. Then we got up and followed him in to the finish. As I recall, the sugar (sweet) ration from the war ended in 1954. Everyone had a bag of sweets in those days – and they shared them. I liked the Merry Maid toffees!

Names Recalled

The following are the names of people I recall from those school days. Of course there were other chums whose names I have forgotten, but were equally important to me. I would love to hear from any of the teachers and fellow students at Toot Hill during the period 1954-1956. My email address is listed below. Teachers at that time who I remember include: the Headmaster, Mr. R.C. Collins, Miss Paling. Mr. Bradford and Mr. Dix. Students include: Roger Fletcher (we stay in touch), Lawrence Perkins, John Dolby, Gilroy Doddington (Sp?), John (?) Baxter, Yvonne Thornton and Mary Skillington (my sweetheart). Mary was a great runner - the undisputed champion of girls track at that time, with my sister Lynda a close second.

The school was used for boxing lessons on Friday evenings. I used to attend these classes with one of the other Canadians. After boxing, we would visit Reverend Lillingston at the Rectory to play snooker while waiting for the last bus to Langar. Some evenings we missed that bus, but we were able to catch rides with dart team buses parked at pubs. The local fish and chip shop, which was still there a few years ago (at the corner of Market Square) was a favourite spot.

We would love to hear from anyone we knew during those happy school days. We cherish the friendships made and the kindness extended to us during our short stay in your beautiful country.

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Lynda Arnold

One of my earliest recollections was riding to school on a double decker bus. What a novelty that was – we had never seen a double decker bus before! Teachers I remember were Mr. Collins, our Headmaster; Mr. Dix; Miss Paling; Mr. Bradford; Miss Chambers and Miss Pearson. At that time, it was popular for girls to have people sign their autograph books and Mr. Dix, our science teacher, wrote in mine: “to our first Canadian chatterbox.....E.N. Dix”. I must have been very annoying in class, but he was good-humoured about it. I remember one day breaking out in a rash during class and was sent to Mr. Collins. He arranged for me to go home promptly and it turned out to be the Measles. I wasn't very popular as most of the school came down with it soon after. Mr. Bradford accompanied us on bus trips and Miss Chambers taught us Geography. Miss Paling was very sweet and kind. The Canadian boys wore their hair in a brush cut, spiky hair that stood up like a hedgehog, unlike the English boys who had long hair. Miss Paling was amused by how prickly it felt when she patted their heads as she walked between the rows of desks.

My brother Jim and I returned to England in 1987 to visit our long-time friend Roger Fletcher and his family. They held a surprise party for us and invited Mr. Collins, Mr. Dix and a few school chums - Yvonne Thornton (Wigglesworth), Lawrence Perkins and John Dolby. It was such a thrill for us to see them again after so many years, and an evening we will never forget.

I believe that my life-long love for baking began in Miss Pearson's cookery class. We started with making tea, lemonade and blanc mange and ended with the most impressive Christmas cake you could imagine - topped with almond paste, hard icing and decorations. What a gift to bring home at Christmas! My mother was very impressed.

I felt accepted at Toot Hill and made many good friends. Some names that come to mind are Carol Williams, Avril Doddington, John (Sammy) Pritchett and a Prefect, Michael Bingham. It must have been a novelty at first to hear a different accent and I was often asked to “say something in Canadian for us”. The word was “monkey” and I went along with it, but I pronounced the word with an English accent. Their mouths dropped open as they looked at each other. We burst out laughing. It was all in good fun.

One of my classmates, Carol Williams was a figure skater and she inspired me to take lessons which I did at the ice rink in Nottingham. I still enjoy ice skating to this day!

Skipping at break time was one of my favourite things to do, and the girls were very good at it. Of course rhymes were always a big part of skipping and I remember a couple in particular...”the wind, the wind, the wind blows high, blowing (name of person here) through the sky”, etc. Also “Big Ben strikes one tick tock, two tick tock”, etc.

I remember morning assembly when the school gathered in the main hall for prayers and hymn singing before classes began for the day. Also, a favourite were the hot lunches and delicious desserts served with custard, which I wasn't used to but I loved it.

I was always keen to participate in sports and I was fairly good in track and field, relay races, high jump and 100-yard dash. I was happy to be called out of class to practice for a sports event (and a good excuse to get out of work). It was fun watching the boys play cricket, a sport we were not familiar with in Canada.

School wasn't all fun and games. Discipline was strict at Toot Hill. I remember a boy was caught for stealing a Mars bar and got the cane. I thought it was such a harsh punishment for such a small thing (he was probably hungry). But it was a lesson for us all....you don't take something that doesn't belong to you, no matter what. The school aspired to a high standard in moral behavior.

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