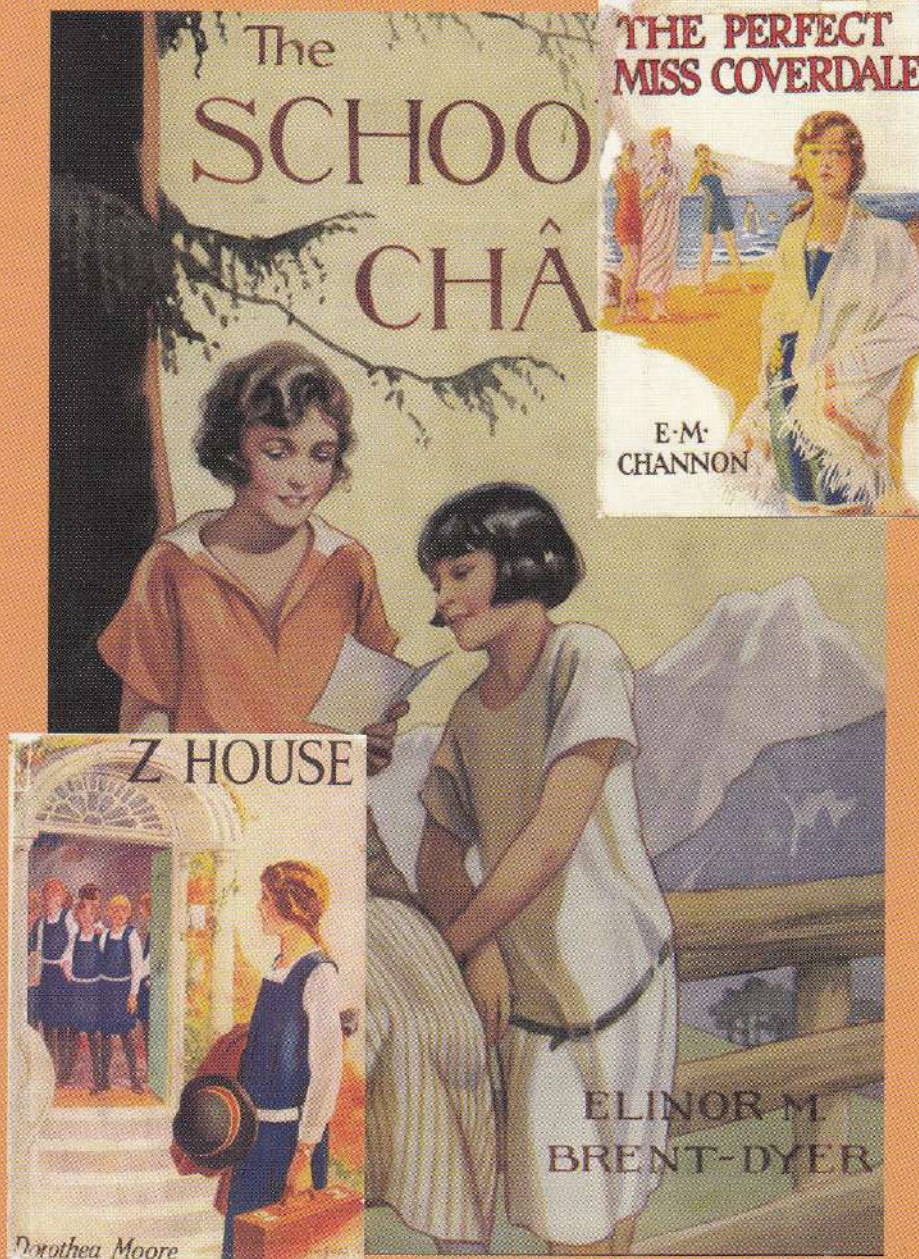


Friends of the Chalet School

Onwards and Upwards
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August 2015

Mark Taha “I will have to read *Seven Scamps* some time. I believe Bjornson was played by Harry Secombe in film *Song of Norway*. The fact that the family was not informed reminds me of Mr. Cochrane’s failing to mention Grizel to his second wife. Also, I seem to remember Nita Eltringham in *Peggy* saying that her Uncle Nigel would be visiting her and Blossom among others, so she and Blossom Willoughby were connected. Were they related? And wasn’t Blossom Nigel’s daughter?”

Favourite Toys



Christine Muir “In the 1940s these were very scarce. My favourite was a china baby doll called Margaret, handed on to me by a friend of my granny’s. She was perfect, very pretty, had a bottle with a teat, and could wet her nappies. I loved her dearly, and she was never damaged, until she went to be repainted at the dolls’ hospital – sadly she looked awful when she came back, and I couldn’t bring myself to play with her again. She, like all our toys, including my dolls’ house, went to the Sick Kids hospital. The other favourite was the Rosebud Twins, featured in *Woman’s Weekly*. Every week there were tiny knitted outfits, and they used very little wool. I learned to cast on and off, decrease, sew up, etc., and it was brilliant fun

to see what was in the magazine the following week. I got a book fairly recently with a compilation of the outfits and they are as pretty as I remember.”

Hilary Hartley “My husband has been diagnosed with dementia, and so I need to be around the house more often – therefore in looking for something I could do to keep me occupied I decided that if a 13-year-old girl called Tom could build a dolls’ house from scratch I ought to manage one as well. I must confess that I have started with a kit, which is now in one piece. I even remembered to paint the ceilings before I stuck it all together. I’ve just started embroidering a very long length of stair carpet, and am wondering how on earth I will manage to get it down on the reverse turns of the stairs as the stairwell is not very wide. I’m sure I’ll find some way as I haven’t yet stuck the stairs in place. I’m now saving madly to try and get the lighting set I need as the next step! The one thing I have completed is the bedside mats, made with a very fine latchet hook and knitting wool – yes I got the idea from Audrey.”



Repetition

Judith Simpson “As far as I can recall, even in junior school in the late 1950s /

the evening of the presentation well. By the way visiting Foulness is not easy. You don't just go there!"



Joey's Songs

Val Walker "Jane Cooper wonders whether Joey sang *The Knight of Bethlehem* by HN Maugham. I should think it most probable, as the words she gives are the same as the first song 'Plato' ever taught the girls in *Jo of*. It is called the *Song of St. Francis* then. He asks the girls what they think of it. Gisela says it is beautiful. Margia agrees saying that both the words and music are simple. The second song they sang was *Brittany*. As a girl I just read all this, but through the years have realised that EBD had a great affection for E Farrar."

The Birth of David James Russell

Jilly Day "I just wanted to say I really enjoyed reading this story by Lynne Cooke. Lynne captured the sense of real fear both Jem and Joey must have experienced when Madge was so ill following the birth of her first son. Jo realised, perhaps suddenly, quite how alone she would be should Madge die and, although Jem would doubtless have provided a home, the happiness would have been lost along with her beloved sister. Of course, Jem had the added professional pressure of knowing quite how desperate the first few hours had been for his dearly loved wife."

The Relative Value of Money

Mark Taha "Writer Julian Barnes' father was a teacher at my old school, (next door to Valerie's and my mother's). Apparently he started on £360 a year in 1937."

Joy Bagster "Like Judith Simpson my mother's account books are in my bureau and after reading her article I looked them up. In 1945 the electricity bill for the year came to 7.13s.6d, by 1950 it had risen to 13.1s.8d. By then we had moved to a larger house so this probably accounted for some of the increase. This covered all cooking and lighting as we did not have gas. Fuel in 1945 cost 17.12s.3d. This was for turf and coke eggs. Coal was not available in Ireland at that time so coke eggs were burned instead. In 1950 the fuel bill amounted to 23.11s.6d. Also, when I began work as an office junior back in 1953 my wages were the princely sum of 25/- per week (about £1.25 in today's money). Half of all our wages were given up at home to help with household expenses. After six months probation I was given a rise of 5/- per week. My mother



advised that the remainder was divided into three parts – for clothes, holidays and spending money. I had my heart set on buying a bright red coat. I think I wanted something entirely different from years of wearing navy school uniform. It took me almost a year but eventually that coat was mine and I wore it for many years. I can see it still. The New Look was in and the skirt was wide and it swished as I walked. I thought I was the bee's knees."

Tyrolean Cape

Jacqueline Armstrong "Twice in books, stories set in the Alps, or out of doors in the winter, refer to a Lodenmantel Tyrolean cape, or Loden warm cloth. It is fairly waterproof, but gets heavy when wet. A long dark grey woollen cape, trimmed with green (I thought you would be interested)."



Joey's Progress

Mark Taha "I had no time for her treatment of Eustacia but I enjoyed her sarcasm to the colonel in *Goes to It*."

Jilly Day "Dorothy Devlin correctly documents the weakness in Joey's complex character. Jo treated Eustacia abominably and failed to demonstrate the Chalet School ethos of kindness and courtesy towards a newcomer. Plus, Jo blaming Eustacia when the Robin exhibited signs of illness verged on the hysterical, also smacked of bullying towards a girl she had never truly forgiven. As to Jo's uncouth manner towards Colonel Black in *Goes to It*, besides being extremely ill-bred, surely Madge and the senior staff should have been worried by such strange and inappropriate behaviour? The adult Jo seemed to require an admiring audience at all times; doting children who dare not worry Mamma by voicing opinions contrary to her wishes, Miss Annersley and her staff whose classes and leisure were frequently disrupted by Jo bursting in for a chat because she was stuck on a chapter of her book, or new girls who all had to be regaled with Jo's schooldays and exploits. Almost every conversation with Jo turns to her achievements or her mischievous school days. As a child reading the Chalet books, I liked Jo, although she was never a favourite character. As an adult she irritates and puzzles me. I wonder why Jo can't be happy and content with her pampered life as Mrs Maynard? Or has Jo perhaps found marriage to dull and controlling Jack a glittering but ultimately hollow crown?"

Jessie Collins "There was a time when I simply took Joey at face value, and enjoyed reading her adventures but felt that she was too good to be true. In later years, re-reading the books, I realized that I was mistaken, but strangely, this has made me like Joey better than I used to do, since I accept now that she is basically a good person, but has various flaws which appear from time to time – and haven't we all got such flaws? The character whom I do find mostly to be too good to be true is

certainly struck a chord. I was born in 1955, but had the same treatment when I was wheezing and suffering from croup and bronchitis during foggy winter days. My mother used to tuck me up in a large armchair and place the kettle on our open fire; I actually found the combination of steam and firelight playing on the ceiling quite reassuring! I don't know what happened to our old kettle but when in 1980 my nine month old son woke in the throes of a severe attack of croup, I rushed him into the bathroom and turned on every hot tap to create a steamy room until he stabilised enough for a dash to A&E. Thank goodness for old remedies!"

Coffee and the Chalet School

Mark Taha "Those who didn't like coffee were probably just told to 'have what you're given.' The ideal Civil Service reply. Short, succinct, and conveys no information whatsoever."

Viv Coffey "My husband had to drink tea at home, which he really disliked. When he went away to school at 13, he was offered the choice – quite progressive for the late 1950s! Just as progressive was the instant mashed potato; being next to Sellafield, fresh vegetables were not an option. It is rumoured that all Old St Beghians glow in the dark!"

Margaret King "Kathleen Porter asked 'what if someone did not like a certain food or drink?' The simple answer was 'go without'. There were no fridges, freezers, supermarket and no air freight bringing provisions from abroad. One had to rely on the local shops and the garden to provide all the food needed by a family. Add the shortage of money in the 1930s, then rationing in the 1940s and early 1950s, things were very difficult and did not improve until the mid 1950s. How true the old saying was 'You'll eat anything if you're hungry enough.'"

Ruth Gemmell "I'm sure milk was available as an alternative to coffee. It is occasionally mentioned in the books. In Chalet School times there was no concern for cholesterol levels or cows' milk intolerance and the general attitude was that children needed lots of milk and cream."



Sunday School Prizes

Joy Bagster "I had been trying for a long time to get any books by Theodora Wilson, my great-aunt whom I wrote about in Ripping Reads some months ago. Much to my delight a copy came up in Sales & Wants so I sent away for it and in March I finally got my wish. (Thank you Janet in South Croydon.) Inside the front cover there is a prize label saying that it was awarded to Joy Hardwick in Christ Church Sunday School, Beckenham, in 1939. I thought it was an extraordinary

coincidence that we shared the same name and year of birth. I wrote to the vicar asking if any of the Hardwick family attended the church although it's unlikely that Joy herself would still be there but I thought her family might like to know that her book is still in circulation and will be greatly treasured. However, to date there has been no reply from the vicar so that part of my story is unfinished. If any FOCS members remember the Hardwick family or attend Christ Church in Beckenham I'd love to hear from them."



Domestic Science

Viv Coffey "I did the traditional O level course and it has stood me in very good stead over the years. I still do a time plan for Christmas lunch. My 19 year old niece was helping us out at a party recently and had no idea that any pans which had had starchy foods in them should be soaked in cold water – surely one of the basics?"

Mark Taha "I always regarded Domestic Science and Home Economics as pretentious titles. Repetition would have suited me – a mine of useless information! I remember getting 2% in my last Physics exam! Civics was another subject that Rosalie Dene taught."

Anna Owens "I envy the people who wrote in to say that they enjoyed these lessons, I loathed

mine. It started very well. The first teacher we had was lovely, but she was just a stand in and when the real teacher arrived, we certainly discovered that life was earnest, life was hard. Fortunately it was only for half a year that we had to endure her, however, the next year we had someone else and she was just as bad. To make matters worse, when I got engaged my mother refused to let me get married (I was just under 21) until I had taken a diploma in domestic cookery and that teacher was as bad as the other two. The only thing that saved it was that all the students bonded against the teacher, but as we were all adults more or less, we did not get up to any pranks."

