



Friends of the Chalet School

107 Onwards and Upwards



February 2015

A Chalet Confab

The Love of the Books

Sheila Hobson "Fiona Preston's comments on the impact EBD had on her life interested me. I was reminded of a retired librarian friend of mine. Back in the late 1960s he was in charge of a library on a council estate in a deprived area in a London borough. He told me that EBD's books were by far the most popular and that the girls were always pestering him for the next book. He concluded that the Chalet School was something so far removed from anything they knew, and with it the idea of foreign travel, that it was, for them, an escape from the reality of their lives. In many ways the love and care shown in the books made them hungry for more. I've often wondered what lasting impression the books had on their future lives."



Small Schools

Mark Taha "The late AS Neill started out as a pupil teacher and wanted to revive the system. I have a mental vision of the Chalet school run on Summerhill lines!"

Sound of Music Flight from the Nazis

Ann Mackie-Hunter "While watching the escape of the von Trapps from the Nazis in the *The Sound of Music* on television at Christmas I thought of *Chalet School in Exile*. The film portrays the sense of menace that came with the Anschluss when you see the swastika banners everywhere and the chilling black clad stormtroopers. However, *Exile* is much more realistic; sadly, like Vater Johann, the nuns would have paid a bitter price for sheltering the family. Nor would the escape have been so easy - in the film the von Trapps drive into the mountains in the stolen car and

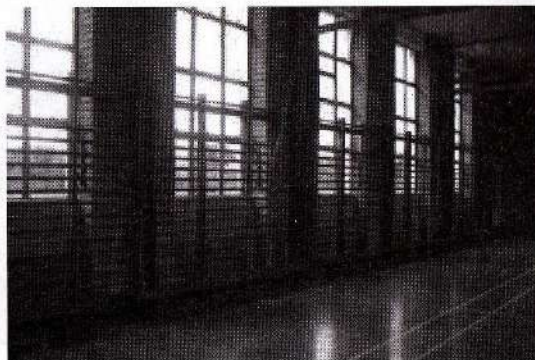


easily cross the border. As *Exile* shows, Jo and the others would not have escaped without Gottfried's knowledge of the mountains and the smugglers ways. EBD says truthfully that the Swiss border guards were armed and would shoot any intruders."



Games

David Bennion “It can’t be often that a reminiscence of games at a girls’ school sparks an immediate recall from a member of the opposite sex, but Ruth Gemmell’s memories of chatting on the wall bars took me straight back to around 1960, when I was in the sixth form at grammar school. The PE teacher by that time had given up any pretence of teaching us, and devoted the lessons to games of basketball. I, and a number of like-minded friends, soon cottoned on to the fact that three personal fouls meant a sending-off, and such fouls didn’t need to be violent. A gentle push would do, so we committed the necessary number of fouls as quickly as possible, and spent the rest of the lesson on the wall bars discussing the philosophy of Hegel, or whatever. It never struck me at the time that it probably suited the teacher to have the serious players on court, and the would-be intellectuals out of the way.”

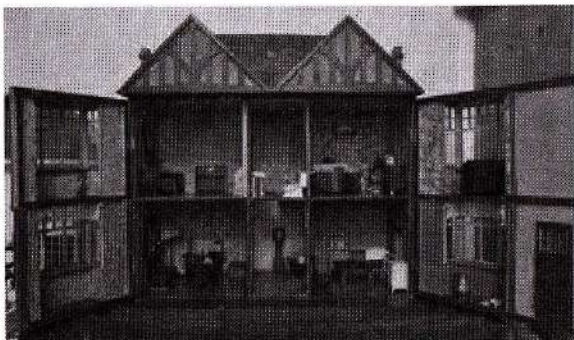


Little Women

Mark Taha “Obvious where EBD got the idea – had I been in Jo’s or Grizel’s shoes, there’d probably have been manslaughter!”

Favourite Toys

Ann Butcher “I had a dolls house exactly like the one Clarissa found depicted – many happy memories!”



Frances Bailey “I loved the picture of the 1950s dolls house, (you realize you’ve started a new topic for the Confab, after the long-running ‘sweets we remember’ it will now be ‘toys we remember’!). I had a much-loved dolls house made for me by my father and uncle (just after the war,

when toys were in short supply), it even had little lights that worked.”

Richenda

Charmian Bilger “In answer to Judy Harris’s question about trams in Interlaken, a little internet research proves that there were trams. However they were discontinued before *Richenda* was published in 1958. I also agree that the

distance between Höheweg and Unterseen is not very far and definitely within the walking capabilities of active Chalet School girls. I suspect that EBD got her information from a pre-war guide-book.”

Ruth Gemmell “EBD’s use of ‘coast’ road for the road along the edge of the Platz must be an error. She must have meant ‘coach’ road, as



this is what she usually called it. Switzerland has no coast, and the road in question is not even along the lake shore. I wonder whether, at this stage in her life, EBD did her own typing, or whether she employed a secretary. It is the sort of mistake which could have been made by inaccurate hearing of dictated material, for example, if an audio-tape was nearly worn out.”

Growing up in Cold Winters

Mark Taha “I spent the winter of 1979 in East Anglia with no central heating and snow in May!”



Ruth Gemmell “The ‘mushrooms’ on the milk bottles were due to the milk freezing (ice takes up more space than liquid milk). At least that was preferable to holes pecked in the bottle top by blue tits. I also remember the intense cold of the days before central heating. My bedroom was unheated even though I was supposed to do my homework there. I think I was a teenager before I was allowed a convector heater. At bedtime, I used to fill my hot water bottle with water that was nearly boiling, and left it uncovered to try to get the maximum warmth. As a result, I frequently got blisters, some of which left long term scars.”

Kunzle Cakes

Viv Coffey “I remember them well – a Saturday afternoon treat. In hindsight, my sister and I should have eaten them slowly and savoured them, but that’s not what children do, is it?!”

Charmian Bilger “Many thanks to Lorraine Brown for reminding me of these delicious cakes. I am re-living the taste of them as I write. I can remember eating the filling first, then licking the inside clean before eating the chocolate

talked about by my mother and her friends as if it were a serious problem – which it was at the time. It’s wonderful how medical treatments have developed in my lifetime. The attitude towards food in that post-war world was also reflected cleverly. Although I don’t think many children went really hungry even if they didn’t have parents who grew their own food and so on, sweets and chocolate biscuits were a real treat. And not really available in such quantities that it was dangerous! In those days most children would need the sugar for all the activities they did – no sitting in front of televisions or crouching over computer screens! And it was a brilliant idea to develop Betsy Lucy as a central character – there is enough about her in the EBD books to make a good basis for the ‘champion’ she becomes.”



Thérèse Larkin “I was delighted to see another fill

-in Chalet book in the GGBP catalogue. It wouldn’t be Christmas without a Chalet book and as I’ve said before I do admire all the people who write these books and I’m very grateful to them. I’ve always liked Betsy Lucy – in fact all of the Lucy, Ozanne, and Chester clans, so I’m looking forward to *Champion of the Chalet School*.”

School Uniform

Griselda Fyfe “School uniform was difficult in the war years. I had various bits of my 12 years older sister’s uniform. Blue Viyella blouses and a rain hat (frightful!) and a summer hat. But my tunic was new and lovely, but after I had grown out of it, it was many years before this particular tunic appeared again.”

Mark Taha “Ann’s pupils deserve an answer. I hardly see how separate summer uniforms help save parents money. What was the rationale behind regulation school knickers? I’d also like to know Vanessa’s mother’s source of information. I once knew a girl who recalled having had to kneel down to have her skirt length checked – athlete Shirley Strong recalled a similar experience at her grammar school – also Jennifer Saunders – headmistress in Britain!”



and run by perhaps the worst

Frances Bailey “When I started grammar school they had a system where you could buy second-hand items of uniform, presumably donated by parents, or parents of pupils who would get together to buy / sell from each other. I remember going with my mother to someone’s house to buy a blazer their daughter had outgrown. And, yes, I, too, remember having to kneel on the school floor to check the length of our tunics!”



Chaperones

Louise Burbidge “Whatever the School’s rules on the subject, while few of us would agree with Emerence Hope’s opinion that ‘Rules were made to be broken’ even the straightest-laced Continental parent would agree that rules must be broken in an emergency – which removing a disruptive pupil definitely is. As for two mistresses being present – nobody can be a pianist and a chaperone at the same time!”

Expressions

Mark Taha “I also loathe the expression ‘woe betide’.”



CS PB / HB Differences

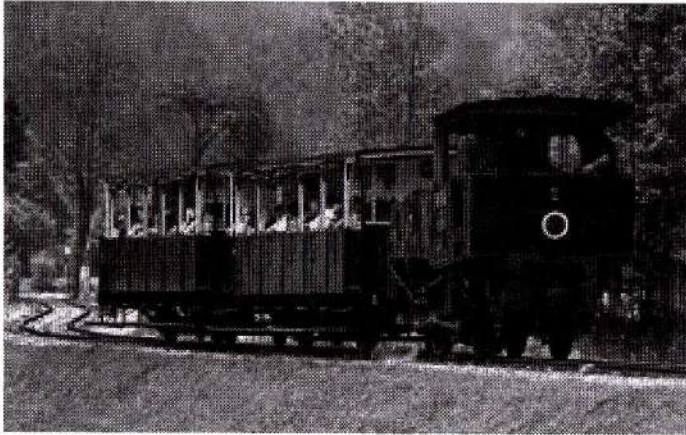
Jeanette Livermore “I have a book which contains two school stories *Trials for the Chalet School* and *Theodora and the Chalet School* and it says that it is ‘Outstanding value 99p’. It is not such a good bargain as it seems, as so much is left out from the original stories that spoken words have to be attributed to the wrong person! I am trying to read all the books in order and have just come to *Trials*. Fortunately, I do have a hardback copy, so am able to read the original, but do keep both open. It is very interesting to see the differences.”

Adine Atkinson “I’ve been borrowing a lot of CS books from Hilary in the Library, which has been a revelation – the cuts I mean, what a

massive difference it is to read the original text! Even when it's only minor cuts, a lot of the atmosphere and depth is lost. I have really enjoyed my research!"

Holidays

Cynthia Castellan "Although we stayed occasionally at Maurach (when we went by coach), mostly we preferred a hotel at Jenbach or (latterly) across the



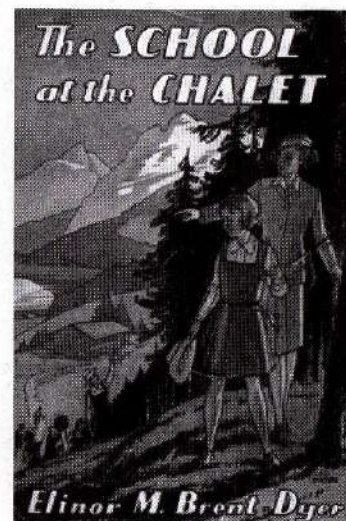
Inn at Rotholz. By this time we knew local people, but before then I would take the bus up to Pertisau. Nowadays I think you would catch it in the yard behind Jenbach station – they were building a new terminal the last time we went - and it certainly made a cheaper alternative to the Achenseebahn."

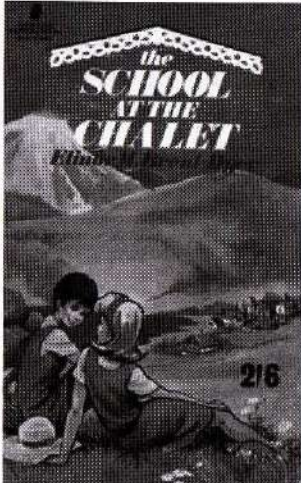
Maureen Sunderland "I was in Kitzbuhel in June with Inghams 'Lakes and Mountains'. I know that they actually have holiday accommodation in Pertisau but I went on an excursion from Kitzbuhel one day to Pertisau with them. I was very pleased when the holiday rep gave us all information about Elinor and the Chalet School as part of her running commentary on the coach and I asked her to mention FOCS as well. We drove past the building which we assume was the site of the school and I heard a few 'oohs' from some of the other passengers. I don't know whether my information about FOCS has brought us any new members but I thought it was worth a try! I did spend a week in Pertisau about a couple of years ago but it was lovely to revisit it."

Mark Taha "Surely £28 a month 'translates' to £336 a year. I live frugally due to an excellent training called being broke!"

EBD and the First World War

David Bennion "It is not quite accurate to say, as I did in Ripping Reads No 10, that EBD ignored the Great War almost completely, when, in Chapter 12 of *School at*, she went to some pains to demonstrate her opinion of Germans. She depicts 'Frau Berlin' as a physically repulsive person; grossly fat, inappropriately dressed, and sweating unpleasantly. Her manners are uncivilized, and she actually spits at





the Chalet School girls at one point. In fact, a thoroughly nasty character. EBD is at pains to point out, in a paragraph omitted from the Armada edition, that it was the North Germans, and particularly the Berliners, who were to blame for the war. A little unfair this on the Germans, when it was the Austro-Hungarians who invaded Serbia in 1914. In the train-crash at the end of the book, Madge saves Frau Berlin's life, at considerable risk to her own, and we have a very early EBD-ism. In Chapter 12, Frau Berlin's 'yellow hair is scraped back...'; in the train-crash she has 'grey hair streaming wildly about her...' And we might enquire whether Ian Fleming ever read the Chalet School books. Madge's rescuer introduces himself 'My name's Russell – James Russell.'

It's Great To Belong

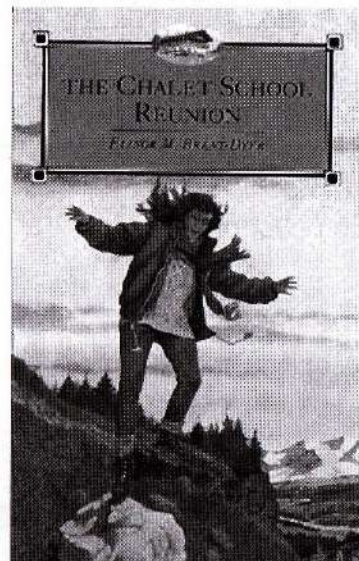
Vanessa Thomas "May I thank Hilary Boulton, who read my article about Childhood Favourites and was kind enough too send me copies of the Bunchy books which I had mentioned as being hard to find? I was really touched by her kindness, and would like to let her know how much I am enjoying re-reading the stories."

Kim Spicer "How *much* I enjoy the magazine!"

Chalet School Reunion

Louise Burbidge "Re the comments regarding *Reunion* – it states on the dustwrapper that Joey had arranged a reunion for 'as many of (her) contemporaries as possible during the school's first year in Tirol'. This rules out Elisaveta, Nancy Wilmot and others ..."

Mark Taha "I went to my university's 50th Anniversary and there were only two ex-students and one lecturer I'd known. People do lose touch especially before Friends Reunited and the Internet."



CS Locations

Ruth Gemmell "Apart from the one time when EBD uses the name Alpenhof, the building is usually referred to as the Tyroler Hof, and is obviously the same place, being set back from the lake shore and surrounded by trees. The school was on the lake shore, further away from the steamer landing, so must be near

the road to Seespitz and the path up to the Barenbad Alm. In EBD's time there was no corresponding building in Pertisau, the area in question being meadow. Similarly with Michaelchurch Court: it is a lovely old house in the right sort of area, but it is not Plas Howell. The architectural style is completely wrong. Why can't people be honest and admit the school buildings are not real places? It is, of course, possible that EBD was copying EJO and moving a stately home from one end of the country to another, for literary convenience."

Catholicism in the 1930s

Alicia Speakman "In *Behind the Chalet School* there is a discussion about sectarianism in the 1930s, mentioning Glasgow and Liverpool as cities where it was particularly rife. EBD was received into the Catholic Church in December 1930. Earlier that same year the Archbishop of Liverpool wished to buy a plot of land in the city



centre on which to build a cathedral. The plan was bitterly opposed by a particular citizen called Longbottom who considered it a disgrace that land should be sold to anyone who wanted to build a Catholic cathedral, especially as it was within sight of the (unfinished) Anglican cathedral at the other end of Hope Street. However the sale went through and Archbishop Downey was quoted as saying he was glad he had won by a short nose rather than lost by a long bottom!"

European Visit

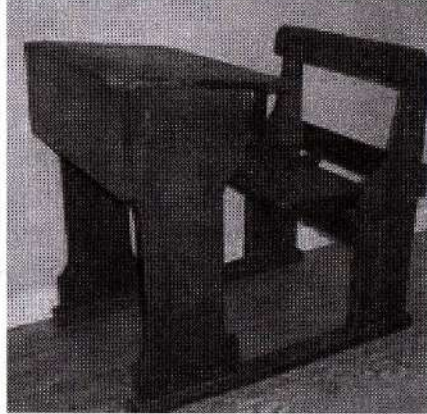
Mark Taha "Churchill said 'all babies look like me' so perhaps the baby Jesuses weren't so unrealistic!"



Folding Desks, Lockers and Satchels

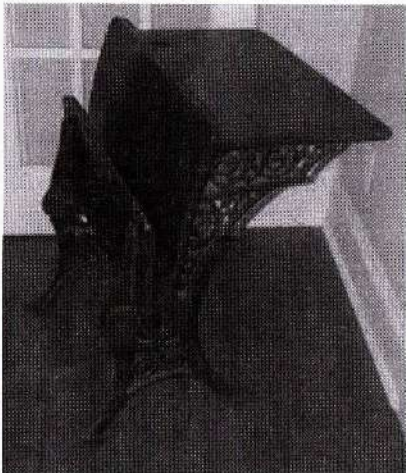
Peter Jones "When I was at school, in the 1940s and 1950s, all our school text books were kept in our desks. In the junior school, all our lessons were given in our form room, but in the grammar school we moved rooms, ie

geography room, physics room etc. Then we just took the text and exercise books that were needed for that lesson. Like Judith Simpson we had a cloak room to hang our hats and coats, but blazers had to be worn at all times, except when it was very hot. We used our satchels to take our exercise books home, and maybe a couple of textbooks, to do homework. Also when we had PT or games, once a week, we had to take our PT or games clothes to school. We did not have any 'lockers'. The photo of the girls with their satchels brought back some happy memories for me. They are very much the continental satchels. I had one given me in Germany in the late 1940s. I still have it, plus a regular English satchel with the shoulder strap. At the moment, school satchels are very much a fashion item!"



Viv Coffey "Following on from Fiona

Preston's comment about folding desks, I agree that there isn't much coherence in the CS books, but I remember that we had them for public examinations, which were held in the school – nowhere to hide any cribs! I also recall at junior school having to push the chair as far into the desk space as possible and at grammar school to upturn it onto the desk, to aid the cleaners. Jolly practical – I wonder if it happens nowadays?"



Ruth Gemmell "I came across these in one form, the only one that provided lockers for our books, but we didn't move the desks around. When folded, they would only have shown the groove for a pen and the hole for an inkwell. When the

flap was lifted to the horizontal, two gate-legs could be folded out, to left and right, leaving a good space for the knees."

Leaving The Old Children's Bookshelf

Mark Taha "Sorry to see so many specialist bookshops close. I miss quite a few in London, as well as the Popular Book Centres."

Travelling by Train

Sue Biggs "I saw the letter sent in by Peter Jones to *The Daily Telegraph's* Travel Section in November about travelling by train across Europe in the 1960s. I used to go with my family to Tirol almost every Christmas from 1962.

We would catch the night train from Victoria, then the ferry and the train to Munich, before changing for the train to Innsbruck. Overnight we would always have a couchette. One year my father tried to economise by getting my sister and I to share one. We may have been quite small but it just didn't work with one pushing the other off the narrow seat!"

Domestic Science

Kathleen Westhorp "ViV Turner's piece about cooking at school made me remember when taking my O Levels that the bread we had to make could not be marked as it was found that the yeast had died! The school provided yeast. I won't tell you what the 'bread' we made turned out like!"

Mark Taha "Pretentious name, like Food Technology. I'm reminded of the exchange in that classic film *The Happiest Days of your Life*. Headmistress: 'You've made porridge before.' Pupil: 'But nobody had to eat it!'"



Romance in the Chalet School Series

Doreen Moodie "My husband told me that he proposed because he 'felt sorry for me!' However, it is our Golden Wedding in 2015, so I must have done something right!"

Sweet Memories

Kim Spicer "Christine Murr told of Tommy inadvertently drinking a large mug of Bisto in the belief it was cocoa. My fiancé-of-the time was Swiss and, quite frankly, greedy for anything chocolate. We were in Greece on a missionary-training thing. Money was tight and we had a strict budget for food, but one day he discovered a jar of dark, black chocolate spread. Ravenously he spread it thickly on a piece of bread and took a huge bite. He was nearly sick – it was Marmite. He's *definitely* someone who doesn't like Marmite!"



Anna Owens "Frances Bailey is wrong to think that gob-stoppers no longer exist, at least they did last year. My son and his family were visiting from Winchester and on the Saturday my daughter-in-law, Jenny, and my grand-daughter Ellie and I went into

Warrington to look at the shops. One of the first shops we stopped at was an old-

Catching a Crab

Kim Spicer “Judy Harris asks if this is specific to rowing – I have always understood it to be so.”

Charmian Bilger “This rowing term is used for ‘a faulty stroke that causes the blade of the oar to strike the water on the recovery stroke’. In other words as a rower is bringing back the oar in the air ready to put it in the water for the next stroke the oar accidentally touches the water. This causes the rower to fall over backwards/sideways. It is a very undignified position as I know from personal experience!”

Judy Harris “To ‘catch a crab’ is to misjudge the height of the oar, when rowing. This means that the actual blade part of the oar hardly enters the

water. This is a major problem in two ways, one there is no resistance to the oar, so the rower often falls backwards and if the blade just catches the surface, which is usual, the oar shoots up a pile of water, often soaking the rower. I used to belong to a school rowing club, and I guess have ‘caught many a crab’!!

Ruth Gemmell “Anyone who has tried rowing has probably done this. It has nothing to do with crustaceans but is a faulty stroke usually shallow and ineffective.”

Mark Taha “Surely it just means making a mistake.”



Coffee and the Chalet School



Kim Spicer “I was surprised to read that several people are happy to drink dried coffee products (such as Nescafe), *as* coffee. To my palate they are a completely different drink to coffee made from beans!”

Cynthia Castellan “In WW2 I worked in London and lived at a girls’ club in Lancaster Gate. We knew

about Nescafe and longed to try it, but could not do so because it was ‘zoned’,

song. The Robin sang it through five times to reach Joey.

We sang Happy 40th Birthday to Elspeth Hough who brought along a Chalet school cake.

The Edinburgh group meet every 4-6 weeks and can be contacted on 01506 843074 (after 7pm) or by email: janette.purbrick@blueyonder.co.uk New people are always welcome.

London

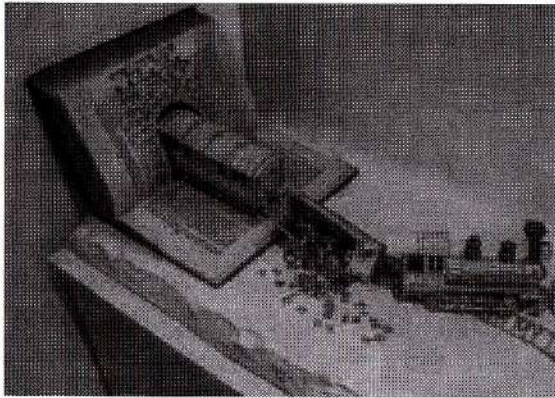
by Sue Biggs

The last London meeting at the Rugby Tavern was on 20th November with 12 people. After organising the tables and ordering food and drink, the theme was memoirs and biographies of collectable children's authors.

Charlotte started with the *Little House* books and how close to reality these were, with how much editing carried out by Laura Ingalls Wilder's daughter, Rose. Shirley followed with the Betsy-Tacy series and Jill talked about the life of Rosemary Sutcliff from her memoir, *Blue Remembered Hills*. Joy was next with *Jacky Daydream* by Jacqueline Wilson while Nicky looked at *Frost in May* by Antonia White, which is based on her childhood and Susan discussed *A House Unlocked* by Penelope Lively. Rosemary had brought the biography of Eileen Hemming, who wrote stories of girls and aviation under the name Dorothy Carter and learnt to fly herself, and Mark talked about the biography of Frank Richards, while Judith discussed Helen Mclelland's biography of Elinor Brent-Dyer, which really started off the London meetings and resulted in so many collectors getting together. Finally Sally brought M E Allan's booklet, *The Background Came First*, particularly looking at the locations for her books and Sue chose *Susan and Friends*, which also concentrated on locations.

About 12 of us met up in the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall on 11th December to exchange Christmas cards and visit the Christmas Market on the South Bank. There was some confusion over where we were meeting but finally both groups joined up and spent a few hours chatting. This included trying the food available on some of the stalls outside.





purpose of creating lovely book sculptures then contact me at the same address and I'll send my 'for sales' list.

PPS

On the other hand if you just want to stick 'em on the shelves and read 'em again the same as you always have done, don't stand in the way of progress, but contact me for more!



To Tell or Not to Tell
- Running Away
by Kim Spicer



In response to my observation that Jean never comments on the fact that Carola had run away to school, Mark Taha said: "(Jean) might have been dumbstruck, not interested, or simply not listening."

I've been pondering this. While these possibilities are certainly imaginable in the Real World (RW), I wonder how they fit into the Chalet School World (CSW)? I've been trying to think of similar events, where a girl did something



Grizel leaves for the Falls in
Head Girl

wrong and had been told not to tell anyone about what she had done, and then, did the Awful Truth ever come out, by fair means or foul, and what was the outcome?

At present I can't think of anything similar apart from:

1. Grizel's exploits running away to the Reichenbach Falls. Elinor developed this story-line in order to show how the difficult Grizel became more assimilated into the CSW.
2. Elisaveta ran away but everyone knew about that.
3. Joan made a dash for it at one point but was recognised and brought back into line. I think it was generally hushed up and no-one who wasn't supposed to know found out about it.