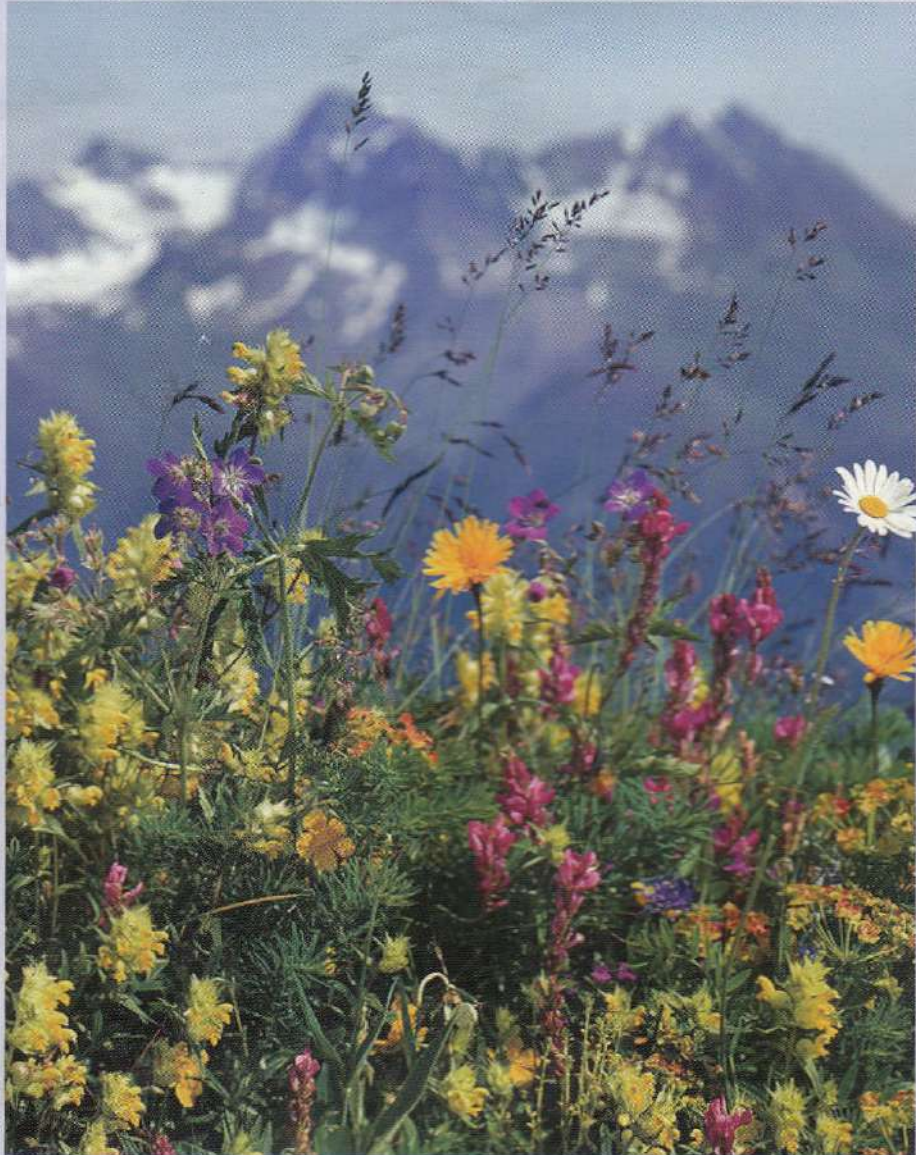




# Friends of the Chalet School

Onwards and Upwards  
108



May 2015



teach before being rewarded by marriage with a doctor. I would like to think that our friendship would have lasted into adulthood and that she would have invited me to Aberdeen.”

**Barbara Hall** “I think our favourite CS period is often based on the first books we read and those, for me, were *The Wrong Chalet School* and *The Chalet School and the Island*. I would like to have been friends with Blossom Willoughby, always one of my favourite characters, partly because of her beautiful name.”

**Anne Barnes** “At last, someone else who dislikes Jack Lambert! I have always thought her to be an unsympathetic character, as well as totally irritating in the way she pesters Len. She definitely wouldn’t be one of my friends.”

**Mia Jha** “Who would I most like to have been friends with? Definitely the whole Bettany clan. And because I can’t choose a favourite school location, I’d have liked to visit them all at The Quadrant during the holidays!”

**Mark Taha** “I’d have enjoyed discussing Greek mythology with Eustacia. I would also enjoy talking to the likeable rebels Evadne, Cornelia, Margia, the Tyrol’s Betty and Elizabeth, and Emerence.”

**Judith Simpson** “I think I would have opted for the early days – as Susanne says, the ‘golden days’. Almost all the girls seem pleasant, and normal. Joey is allowed to have faults – in fact, I have just got to *And Jo* in my re-reading, and am surprised at how often in the books about her at age 15-16 she is described as frowning, or arguing, or sulking because she can’t get her own way about something. I suspect the Plas Howell days would have been fun, too, although there are so many gaps in what EBD wrote about them that it is difficult to get an overall impression.”

**Susanna Reece** “I always wanted to be friends with Clem Barrass, because she was so sparky and self-assured. Also Katharine Gordon, although (like Susanne) I lack sporting skills so doubt if she would have been very interested in me. I agree that Gill Linton would be a very reliable friend, also Elinor Pennell, I think. But my top pick would be Stacie Benson. I always identified with her, and *Eustacia* was one of my favourite books as a child. In my view, EBD is actually quite unkind in her portrayal of Eustacia and on this occasion it is the Chalet School folk, particularly Madge and Joey, who are pretty ‘unneighbourly’ before matters are resolved. As someone who has faced her own demons, I think Stacie would be a true friend, gentle and kind, and full of interesting, intelligent conversation!”







## School Uniform

**Barbara Hall** “When I joined my co-educational grammar school in 1980 it was just four years after the amalgamation of an all-boys college and all-girls high school. A new uniform was in place but I remember some of the senior girls still clinging on to their old high school blazers. I didn’t blame them as I thought their grey wool blazers, piped with blue edging, were much nicer than our burgundy synthetic ones. Also, when I started, there had been a problem with the supply of the junior girls’ tunics in time for the start of term. My parents bought me a second-hand high school tunic to tide me over. I also preferred it over the new style

tunics, as (to my eyes anyway) it was more like those in the illustrations of my beloved boarding school stories. I remember reluctantly having to change to the new style tunic when I grew out of the second-hand one.”

**Mia Jha** “At our grammar school in Melbourne in the 1980s we had to kneel to have the length of our summer dresses and winter skirts checked. We wore black stockings with our winter uniform and as some teachers weren’t too fussy about where we knelt we would rise with decidedly dusty looking kneecaps!”

**Hilary Whing** “Yes, I too had to have it measured from the knee, and we were not allowed to leave school without our gloves on. Panama hats in summer and velour ones in winter – through the war years they did relax a little. And woe betide anyone who was caught eating anything outside school in our school uniform, even if it was a nice rosy apple. Thinking of those war time years and the ration and points books with sweets on coupons, I suppose less sugary sweets were good for me.”

**Lorna Rutter** “Mark Taha’s comments about school skirt lengths made me smile. My headmistress did the same! But then I did go to the same grammar school with Shirley Strong and Jennifer Saunders!”

**Ruth Gemmell** “In reply to Mark Taha’s query about regulation school knickers, I think the general idea was that all girls should look alike, even underneath the main uniform. I’m not sure if they were cheaper than what the family would otherwise have chosen but they were suitable for running around the gym – we were not supposed to wear our games skirts indoors. Needless to say, wearing regulation knickers was a rule broken by many, though the correct items were kept in the





cloakroom with the other games uniform. Many girls normally wore a variety of flimsy pants except for games. There was even a brief fashion for brightly coloured and often patterned knee-length bloomers with lace at the bottom, but we were sixth form by then and could escape games by taking on an extra academic subject. This was also the era of the mini-skirt, and many girls had skirts that touched the floor when kneeling, but were then rolled up to a much shorter length for everyday wear.”

**Judith Simpson** “We had to kneel down and have our skirt lengths checked at the beginning of every term. As to separate summer uniforms saving parents money, in those days the dresses probably didn’t cost all that much more than a set of lighter-weight blouses would. Our viyella uniform blouses would certainly have been too hot for summer, along with our quite heavy tunics, and certainly our tweed winter skirts. Also, remember that people probably didn’t have more than two or three summer dresses, and if you wore your uniform ones all the time at school, that was two or three non-uniform dresses your parents didn’t have to buy. As to the knickers, certainly until about the end of the junior school (and possibly up to about Year 8 in modern speak), we wore them for gym and dance.”



**Valerie Dane** “At my school, which Mark Taha’s mother also attended although a few years before me, we wore navy, thick serge shorts for outside games. These came down to about one inch above the knee, had a pleat at the front and were too hot in the summer. However for indoor gym and games we wore only the regulation navy school knickers and an aertex shirt. I refused to wear the baggy bloomer type knickers which were thin and lost their colour after a few washes. My knickers, which were fully fashioned and fitted properly, were ordered from Whiteleys in Bayswater and as they were expensive I had to have them as a Christmas or birthday present.”

**Jane Verrall** “Mark Taha’s question about the rationale behind regulation school knickers intrigued me. I had never thought about it. They were something we wore (navy blue in my case), as we did grey knee length socks in the autumn and spring terms and white ankle socks in the summer term. I asked a number of friends and all except one had worn the regulation knickers (she was at secondary school in Plymouth during the war so obviously things were different there because of all the bombing). No one knew why we wore them, we just did. Several friends said they did gym in them. I vaguely remember that we took off our gymslips and ties and put on our plimsolls to do gym. One friend suggested that we wore them ‘for modesty reasons’ so as to look respectable at all times. Incidentally, we didn’t have to kneel down to have our skirt length checked at school. However, at teacher training



Cambridgeshire, and I once found myself embarrassed after telling him loudly to be quiet in rather impolite Welsh, only to discover that the milkman, who was outside the door, had understood exactly what I said, as his mother had been Welsh. These days I only remember a smattering, which I find very useful for answering unsolicited phone calls. Incidentally, my sons moved on to boarding school, where they had the choice of numerous languages to learn, but both decided to continue with Welsh. It was taught by an Irish priest, which I suspect must have produced an unusual accent.”

**Ruth Gemmell** “In reply to Vanessa Thomas’s comment about the mutations in the Welsh language, I would like to say that I find them fascinating (not that I would ever pretend to speak Welsh, but I have picked up a little, having lived in both North



and South Wales, and most of my friends can speak Welsh, even if it is not their first language. I have also sung in Welsh, both hymns and folk songs.) For those who have never heard of mutations, they are changes in the beginnings, not the endings of words, and I think other Celtic languages also have them. Only certain letters change, and only in certain situations. I won’t include the whole list, but use as an example the letter C, as in Cardiff (Caerdydd). After “and”, the C would become CH. After “to”, it would become G, and after “in”, it would become NGH. Very complicated, but if you’re used to listening to real

Welsh speakers, they often carry these changes over and use them when speaking English as well.”

**Mark Taha** “Surely all languages must have different regional accents? I remember reading –maybe in this magazine – that Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Austrian accent was almost unintelligible in Germany.”

**Jane Cooper** “When I had just left school, I met and made friends with an Austrian girl who was in this country on some kind of exchange. We have remained friends ever since, and our children and now grandchildren are keeping up the link. When we met her English was very good and my German was non-existent. On my first visit to her family her father – a doctor – and I tried to communicate through the medium of Latin! Much later, when my husband was posted to Munich, I did learn German – a crash course at the Goethe Institute (eight weeks, five days a week, four hours a day and homework!). By the end of that I could manage reasonably well, and what a strange experience it was to meet Fritzi, my friend, her family and neighbours, for the first time afterwards, and talk to them directly instead of through Fritzi’s interpretation. Then I also realised that I had learned Hochdeutsch and what the villagers spoke was an Austrian dialect almost totally incomprehensible to me.



Mark Taha “Chocolate machines were a bit like fruit machines in that you often didn’t get anything back!”

Jilly Day “To get a mouthful of Marmite whilst expecting the delicious taste of chocolate fills me with sympathy for Kim Spicer’s partner – poor man, what a shock. It reminds me of the time my brother-in-law and I, having trudged up the steep, dusty hillside to our holiday villa, treated ourselves to a glass of the orange juice which we thought my sister had mistakenly left beside the sink instead of in the fridge. We filled a couple of glasses and thirstily took a mighty swig – of bleach!”

Jane Cooper “I remember, while rationing was still in force, buying little tins of Horlicks and Ovaltine tablets which were not rationed. They made a good substitute.”



### Finding CS Hardbacks

Susan French “I went for a walk on a cold February day and called into a second-hand bookshop around Manchester. I’d been in before but today I spotted a Chambers hardback, reprint 1962, copy of *Highland Twins* in decent-to-good condition with a good dust wrapper. The price inside was £6.50 – needless to say I bought it and will give it a good home! So it can happen.”

Anne Barnes “How lovely to see a mention of the Loreto Convent in Gibraltar. During my husband’s posting there I attended a fête at the convent, where I found a (slightly battered but readable) hb copy of *Exploits* for 50p.”



### *Champion of the Chalet School*

Ruth Gemmell “I would like to add my praise to everyone else’s. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and it was especially nice having Betsy Lucy as a central character. She has sometimes been overshadowed by other girls such as Julie and Bride – whom EBD seemed to prefer, focusing on them in the sixth form, then switching more to Mary-Lou after they left. My thanks go out to all the fill-in writers. In the past I have read the entire CS series many times, but recently it was the first time for me with all the extra titles in the correct place. It makes such a difference having the gaps filled.”



**Margaret Taylor** "I was given *A Chalet School Champion* as a Christmas gift and really enjoyed reading it during my short break from Boxing Day to just after New Year. I've always liked Betsy Lucy as a character, and felt that EBD didn't really use her enough, so enjoyed how Adrienne depicted her."

**Mark Taha** "I remember Betsy as Head Girl in *Mary Lou*. Third formers deciding to behave themselves while the middles are rebelling! I don't so much believe that rules are made to be broken as that petty rules are made to be ignored."

**Joy Bagster** "I bought myself this book as a 'me' Christmas present. Well done to Adrienne Fitzpatrick for a really genuine Chalet book. I had intended to read it over the Christmas period but I couldn't put it down until I read it right through and then I started again at the beginning and took my time. I loved the way the character of Betsy Lucy was written without being a 'goody-goody' but yet she was able to show her classmates what a Chalet girl should be. I'm sure Elinor would have approved of this book!"

### Len's Ponytail

**Mark Taha** "Why did Matron object to Len having a ponytail? More convenient than plaits, surely?"



### Repetition

**Jane Verrall** "Cynthia Castellan asked about repetition. It was very much part of my schooldays. The last term in junior school the headmaster had us learning poems every Friday afternoon. He was very fond of John Masefield's work. At grammar school, during the first year at least, it was a poem or a Shakespeare speech every week. The frequency declined as we moved up the school until we got to O Level work, and then started all over again. I think all this learning by heart was to exercise our brains and to give us a store of knowledge. Perhaps, being cynical, there was less marking to do! I also had to learn a Bible verse a week from the age of seven until about 11. I'm very grateful for the store of verses, poems and speeches that I have. I may forget people's names or why I went into the kitchen but I still remember 'I will lift up my eyes unto the hills' or 'Earth has not anything to show more fair' or 'There is a tide in the affairs of men' et al."

**Ruth Gemmell** "This was an occasional rather than a regular part of school work for me, both at primary and secondary schools. Usually the piece to be learned was a poem or an extract from Shakespeare, but once it was a psalm. You could be asked to repeat it back at any time, either out loud or written down, with correct punctuation. I can still remember some of what I had to learn."

**Joy Bagster** "Do schoolchildren learn repetition nowadays? I think it's very good



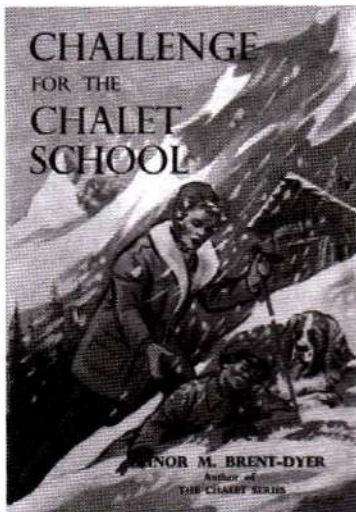
memory training that will stay with them all their lives – even if it’s only times tables! I can recite poems that I learnt in school more than 60 years ago. At that time we learnt poetry in school, Bible verses in Sunday School and Girls Brigade, and whole chunks of prose for school plays.”

### Running Away – To Tell or Not to Tell

**Mark Taha** “Surely Grizel ran away to Schaffhausen – the Reichenbach was where Holmes settled things with Moriarty. Wasn’t it Eustacia who ran away and Elisaveta who was kidnapped? Miss Wilson told Gay to go straight to prep and not tell anyone about what she’d done. As for Annis, I’d have asked her what was the point of running away when term was ending the next day and she’d have been free not to go home?”

**Ruth Gemmell** “Other names of pupils who ran away include Eustacia Benson and Jocelyn Marvell. The former got her just desserts (or rather more than) and the latter was just an excuse for Mary-Lou to interfere again, without any long term improvement in her behaviour.”

**Judith Simpson** “Everyone knew what Gay had done because she brought German measles back with her. There’s Eustacia to add to Kim’s list, and Grizel’s attempt to climb the Tiernjoch. Jocelyn Marvell tries to run away in *Challenge*. I’m not sure whether you would count Val Gardiner in *Redheads* as ‘running away’, since she only sets off to visit her brother at the San. But what about Cornelia when she is captured by Signor Arnolfini and taken into the salt caves in *Head Girl*? She had gone off to try to discover the caves, but she did it because she was at odds with the whole school. Most of those who are told not to discuss it have run away out of school hours (holidays or half-term) or before they reach the school. It’s quite difficult to keep something under wraps if it happens during the term, and I think that all of those occasions were known about. When you add it all up, I agree with Kim that there do seem to be quite a lot of them across the series.”

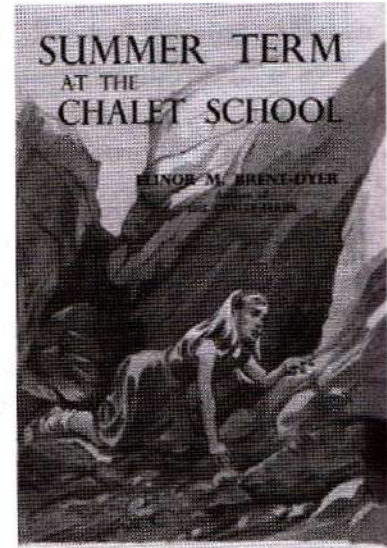


### *Challenge*

**Judy Harris** “I’m sure this has been discussed before, but I am up to *Challenge* in my Chalet School re-read, and I am feeling somewhat confused. In *Adrienne* Philippa Maynard has an urgent operation for mastoid trouble. I wasn’t sure what that was but having researched it on Google I gather it is an infection of the



skull area, often affecting the inner ear. It sounds most unpleasant! Thankfully, by *Summer Term*, Phil appears to be recovering well. Indeed, I seem to recall her even being back at home. However, at the beginning of *Challenge* we hear that Phil suffered from polio last term and is still very unwell and still at the San. Later, Felicity notes that she has not seen Phil for three months. When did Phil have polio? The only explanation I can come up with is that she must have come down with polio as soon as *Summer Term* ended – which would more or less reconcile Felicity’s observations with Phil’s health in *Summer Term*. Also, at the beginning of *Challenge* Mélanie tells Evelyn Ross that she (Melanie) is in Vb. However, I thought that Mélanie was in Vb with Ruey when she joined the school, two years before that. I also seem to recall that Mélanie wasn’t much younger than the triplets (who by this time are nearly 18), so what is she doing in Vb for the third year in a row? (I note that she has moved up to the Sixth Form by *Althea*, so perhaps Elinor realised the inconsistency!)”



## TB

**Joy Bagster** “At the start of the 20th century TB was common in Ireland where it was also known as consumption. If it was a severe case it was called ‘galloping consumption’ and patients died soon after diagnosis. At that time the only cure was bed-rest in open-air sanatoria. My mother was one of eight children and she and a younger brother and sister got TB as a result of the Spanish flu which swept the world after the First World War. My mother survived, possibly because she was older but sadly her 13 year old brother and three year old sister both died from the disease. All three children were kept at home and had to sleep in a bedroom with the windows open wide even in winter. A sheet was hung over the door

and the rest of the family could not go into the room apart from her mother. I don’t know how long this quarantine lasted. Only very wealthy families were sent to Switzerland.”

## Lady Acetylene Lampe

**Mark Taha** “Has anyone ever thought of writing the story of the Lady Acetylene Lampe and her faithful attendant?”