

## K For KNICKERS

Running around the communal back yard one day, chasing Susie, the neighbours' dog, we crashed into the wooden clothes prop holding up the washing line. Down came the washing. Pink bloomers that had been sailing, their legs blown high in the wind, fell into the dirty puddles left behind on the flag stones. Aunties and Grandmas wore pink bloomers that came down to their knees. They were often revealed as they crossed their legs in front of the fire, then hastily covered as they pulled down their skirts. The lady supposedly teaching us to swim at the Public Baths could not help expose her bloomers to the group of ten year olds, clinging grimly to the side of the pool, splashing our legs, week after week. Our view from water level was a vast expanse of pink knicker leg.

My favourite pair of knickers were blue and frilly. They matched the dress made for me for the Whitsuntide walks. The dress had puffed sleeves and smocking; the knickers had the same lace as the dress collar.

The knickers I had to wear at Junior School were sensible white aertex with matching vest. The label said 'St Margaret'. Who was she? The sister of St Michael? In the classroom, as we changed behind our desks for Music and Movement in the school hall, it was hard not to notice whose mother did not use Persil. Their whites were definitely not whiter than white.

The day came, during the school holidays in the year I turned 11, when I was taken into Manchester to be kitted out in my Grammar school uniform. Navy skirt, white shirt, navy and red tie, navy V-necked sweater, grey knee socks and blazer! But, horror of horrors, my delicate aertex knickers had to give way to thick navy blue with tight elastic, a double gusset and a small pocket on the front.

*"What's the pocket for, Mum?"*

*"In case you want to spend a penny!"*

Things have improved in the underwear department. Even now I have my favourite pants, my lucky knickers. Briefs, thongs, panties, shorts, the choice is endless but, if I want to feel good about myself, instil confidence in myself, I root through my underwear drawer to find that special pair.

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