

P for PLAYING OUT

We went to live on a post-war council estate in Waterloo when I was seven. The estate was full of young families so there was never any shortage of play-mates. There were few, if any, cars so the street was our playground after school. Weekends and school holidays we played 'down the brook' on the land belonging to Limehurst Farm. The fact that we were on the farmer's land tinged our play with some excitement, thinking that, at any minute, the farmer might appear, waving his stick and setting his dogs on us. We would spend all day there in the long summer holidays when the sun shone, every day, or so it seemed. Mum would give us a brown paper bag with jam sandwiches inside and a bottle of Tizer pop to keep us going till teatime. We would dam the stream, catch tiddlers and newts and make daisy chains. The more daring of us laid pennies on the railway line so that passing trains would squash them flat. Fortunately, none of us were squashed flat.

We made dens inside the hawthorn bush and pretended we were on holiday at Blackpool whilst digging in the sandy hole. We organised treasure hunts with complicated maps and clues left under stones.

In the street we would tie one end of a skipping rope to the lamp-post. Then we would choose who was 'turning up' (turning the rope) by standing in a circle, all holding out our hands, curled into fists, and someone would hit each fist in turn whilst we all yelled: "*One potato, two potato, three potato, four, five potato, six potato, seven potato, more.*" Whoever's fist was hit when we counted 'More' was out until the last one 'in' was chosen to 'turn up'. We had countless skipping rhymes, many of which we seemed to have learned from birth!

*I am a Girl Guide dressed in blue,
These are the actions I must do,
Salute to the Captain,
Bow to the Queen,
And turn my back ,
To the boy in green (meanwhile performing all the actions whilst skipping)*

*Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Touch the ground,
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Turn around,
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Walk upstairs,
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Say your prayers,
Teddy bear, teddy bear
Turn out the light,
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Say goodnight!*

Jelly on a Plate
Jelly on a plate
Jelly on a plate
Wibble wobble wibble wobble
Jelly on a plate

Hide and Seek was another popular game as we had gardens, sheds, and outdoor lavatories to take refuge in. We would try to 'run in ' and tag the place where the person counting to 100 had just left to hunt for those hiding or just wait in delicious anticipation to be found.

I liked games of 'Tick' where you could dash about and plead immunity by jumping up on to the kerb. The roadway was always marked out with hopscotch squares. The old Elastoplast tin was an excellent sliding tool to reach the numbered squares in turn. Big arguments broke out when the tin slid just over the line of the right square.

The roadway was an unofficial playground and there were always plenty of kids to play chasing games like '*Farmer Farmer*' when one child stood in the middle of the road and all the rest lined up along the pavement on one side of the road. We sang "*Farmer Farmer, may we cross your golden field?*" The child chosen as 'It' would give the signal and everyone would make a dash for the other pavement whilst trying to avoid being tagged. If you were tagged you had to join the 'Farmer' in the middle and soon there'd only be a few remaining runners to be caught.

In the school playground we played more sedate games or took turns 'tipping up'. That involved tucking your dress into your knicker legs to preserve some modesty before doing a handstand with feet touching the wall. The school's outside walls were put to great use for ball games. We played ball up against the walls with two balls, and three balls if you were clever. Children who found it difficult to make friends could always occupy themselves with a small rubber ball; in that way they did not stand out as loners as they would today.

'*The Good Ship Sails through the Alley Alley O,*' was another popular singing game. Singing, as we made arches, and went under in twos was great fun during "*London Bridge is Falling Down*"

Another game was, '*What time is it, Mr. Wolf?*'

Again, one person would be 'on,' and would answer our question, '*What time is it, Mr. Wolf?*' with, '*One o'clock.*' Advancing one step we would repeat the question, and the reply would be, '*Two o'clock,*' and we would continue and at the same time we would creep up to the wolf until we heard the wolf say, '*It's dinnertime and I'm going to eat you.....*' With that, we all had to run away to avoid being caught. If we were caught, then we were the next wolf.

One popular game played in the school playground was '*Queenio CoCo, Queenio CoCo, who's got the ball?*' One child would be Queenie and the rest of us would stand with our hands behind our backs, passing the ball along without being seen and chanting "Queenio CoCo, Queenio Co-Co, who's got the ball?" Each in turn would show empty hands and chant, "See, I haven't got it, it isn't in my pocket" and then the next person said, "And I haven't got it," and

so on along the line of children. When it came to the turn of the child with the ball, that child would throw the ball down and that was the signal for everyone to run away. Queenie had to catch someone and then that child would be the new Queenie.

We had 'gangs' who were big rivals when collecting wood for the annual 'Bunty' on November 5th. Raiding parties went out to steal another gang's wood and woe betide you if you got caught.

Another seasonal game was Conkers, which began by collecting horse chestnut nuts from inside their prickly casings in the autumn. The best and most formidable conkers were those that had been stored from the previous year. Usually you had to ask Dad's help to thread string through the hard nut and secure it with a firm knot. Then you would meet your opponent to play. If you were the first hitter, you had to try to hit your opponent's conker whilst s/he let theirs dangle from the string wrapped around their hand. You had to hope that when it was your turn to have your conker hit, your opponent had good aim otherwise bruised knuckles resulted.

Our council houses on the Downshaw Estate had outhouses, an outside lavatory, the coal shed and a wash house in which the wash tub and mangle were kept along with a lawnmower, Dad's tools and old tins of paint. It was a favourite den especially when it was wet outside. We had a 'Club' and only kids who knew the secret password could come inside the wash house. We dressed up in Mum's old shoes and bits of net curtain and even tried to play the skiffle music using the washboard. We would put on shows and threaten our younger siblings with terrible things if they didn't sit still and watch. We sang nursery rhymes, songs we'd learned at school and even Sunday school hymns. We would act out fairy tales leaving a great deal to the imagination in the absence of scenery or special effects.

Most kids rode old bikes, two wheelers or tricycles with a boot to store things in. Or if they didn't have a bike, they would have made a bogie out of bits of old wood and pram wheels. Tri-ang scooters were all the rage for a while and many of us had roller skates.

There must have been some rainy days and, in the winter, it was often just too cold to be outside for long. Then we would play paper and pencil games such as Hangman, Beetle, Noughts and Crosses and Battleships. Occasionally we would be allowed to take over the dining table for marathon games of Monopoly, Snakes and Ladders and Cluedo. My aged auntie taught me how to play Dominoes and 'Fives and Threes' which was a variation. I learned to play draughts and for my 11th birthday I received a chess set- we'd be learning to play at school but I never had the patience to persevere.
