



#MyBirminghamStory



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UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Susan Brown's #MyBirminghamStory

1. Background

My name is Sue Brown, and I was born in Birmingham in 1938 - almost a year before the start of the second World War. My Birmingham story begins with an early memory of giggling when trying to scramble under what I thought was the dining room table and finding myself suddenly wearing a dear little chamber pot as a hat. The table was a Morrison air raid shelter - used when there was no time to get to the more substantial Anderson shelter in a neighbour's garden - and underneath the table top my parents had hung a pretty pink children's potty embossed with yellow chicks hatching from their white shells.

2. A Special Place

Perhaps due to the war, there was no school on the 1930s estate in Handsworth Wood where we lived, so I had a fairly long way to walk to reach my first school in Churchill Road - and almost as long

a walk to my second one in Rookery Road, but without such a busy main road to cross. I did quite enjoy both places, especially as a nearby shop on a corner of Churchill Road sold apple juice (my favourite!) and, while at Rookery Road, I was a monitor so, instead of cleaning the blackboard properly at playtime I used to try to imitate the teacher's graceful strokes with the chalk as she wrote the alphabet for us to copy.

3. An Important Personal Event

However, when I was 7 years old I began attending a new school - in a sports pavilion. It had three classrooms, was in Wood Lane (sometimes called Romilly Avenue) and was only two fields away from home. A gorgeous-smelling haystack stood outside my classroom window. To celebrate May Day the head teacher, Miss Lyster, organized dancing round the maypole in the sports field. Great fun. I loved it there.

Then one day I remember being with my parents and lots of other adults looking around a brand new school, this time across just one field from home. I have no memory of my younger sister or other children being there, for my mind was fully occupied with the beautiful cloakroom and, you've guessed it, the dear little toilets with their not-quite-

horseshoe shaped wooden seats. I could sit on these without having to jump to get there like I'd had to at Churchill Road and Rookery Road. But almost immediately the lovely new school proved too small for the numbers of children who wished to attend it, so the sports pavilion became an annexe - both under Miss Lyster's headship. I have such happy memories of Cherry Orchard School. Its motto - chosen by the children - was "Aim High".

4. Reflections

Little did I realize then just how high the campaigners for that school had aimed! Certainly, until after the death of my mother (Mrs. Irene Mason) in 1970 I had no idea that she and a neighbour (Mrs. Edith Hill) were the instigators. From Mom's unpublished autobiography I learned of the two ladies' own battle to overcome wartime shortages of finance, equipment, labour and materials - and sometimes even opposition - as well as enjoying whole-hearted support and encouragement in their efforts from such people as Mr. R.A. Butler, President of the Board of Education. The investigator he sent to interview the ladies expressed astonishment that there was no committee.

The two-person team had been formed to avoid spending precious time in trying to ensure that lots of people would be able to attend the numerous meetings - often held at short notice - that were necessary in those tempestuous times.

I visited Cherry Orchard School when it celebrated its 50th and 70th birthdays. It's larger than it was when I was a pupil but Birmingham-born Miss Lyster would have been so proud that it is still the happy school that she envisaged and always achieved.

And that's my Birmingham story.