

JO EVANS (NEE) JAGO
1937 – 1941

“Non Scholae, Sed Vitae, Discimus” = “For Life, not School, we learn”

Preliminary Examination

Before being able to choose a High School education, all "would-be" entrants had to pass this examination, and depending on the Order of Merit obtained, a place would be offered in a Secondary School or Central School. As I passed in the first 30 in England and Wales I was given a choice and joined Plymouth High in September of 1937 as a "Special Place" pupil. A "Special Place" was one for which the amount of the fee to be charged, if any, was determined having regard to financial circumstances. I was awarded free education, with my parents having to pay only for my books.

I remember my first day - entering the building through the front door. After that we had to use the side door. I was impressed with the long hallway with coconut matting, long forms on either side, and School photos on the walls, for each year past. Also the staircase. Miss Turner, the Headmistress, had her room to the right and there was a large classroom to the left which turned out to be the Music and Art room. I seem to remember (but cannot be sure) that there was a sort of secret entrance to Miss Turner's office? High up on a wall?

School Uniform

From September through to end of April the following year - First Formers wore a navy blue pleated gymslip, with girdle, white blouse, School tie, navy knickers (with pocket - most important for compulsory handkerchief) and white ankle socks, topped by navy blue top coat, gloves and velour hat with School badge. The more senior pupils wore lisle stockings - black for winter and natural for summer.

Summer uniform - four plain linen dresses - blue, yellow, green and biscuit - all with a white revere collar on one side only. Navy blue blazer with School badge and panama straw hat with band of School colours and badge.

Each pupil had three pairs of shoes - outdoor, indoor and gym shoes. These were kept in a blue cotton draw-string bag on her own named peg in the lower corridor (of the old building) outside A1 and A2 classes. This bag was the first article made in Miss Hulbert's sewing class. All items had to be marked with a special sewn-in name tape. These tapes, called "Cache's Tapes" had to be ordered from John Yeo's department store. Any girl found to be wearing outdoor shoes in School was given an Order Mark. Tennis shoes and hockey boots were brought to School on the day of play.

Classroom

Teachers always came to the classrooms to give lessons except when we had gymnastics, cookery, art or music lessons. We then had to go to the appropriate classroom for instruction. Two pupils to a desk which was regularly inspected for

neatness - a blackboard monitoress, an exercise book monitoress and a prefect in each class. When a teacher entered the room and said, "Good morning girls" we all stood and responded in unison, "Good morning Miss" whoever she was. Each pupil had to own a pencil case with ruler, rubber, compass and pen with spare nibs. All kept in a leather school-bag. Three subjects for homework each evening.

Order Marks and Detention

These were penalties for being late, talking in class, not having the correct shoes on, or being found out for eating sweets or ice cream in the street, or in public places in uniform, also for not wearing a hat or gloves. If a pupil obtained three order marks within a week, a detention period of half an hour after School was given to complete a task of the teacher's choice such as tidying a cupboard or extra homework, etc.

Morning Assembly

At the end of the lower corridor there was a huge gong - this was rung for Morning Assembly when all classes, walked in "crocodile file" and in silence to the Main Hall, which was also the Gym. Headmistress, Miss Violet Turner, and teachers, assembled on the platform where Miss Turner took prayers. Then, before the hymn, she would report happenings and future dates of importance relating to the School etc. Miss Hartland, the music teacher would then play the day's Hymn on the piano before we were dismissed, class by class, walking again in silence to a tune of her choice. The gong was also rung between lessons and for lunch time and morning breaks. If fine, girls would go outside but if wet they would go to the Gym and on some occasions dance together to music played on the piano. I remember some tunes that I played, which included "Scatterbrain", "Love is All", "It's Foolish but it's Fun" and "Honeysuckle Rose", sheet music costing between one shilling and sixpence and two shillings each and purchased in Moons Piano and Music Shop opposite the 'Blind Institution' North Hill. After the start of the War, if there was an air-raid warning the gong was rung continuously for us to go to the shelter.

The Bicycle Shed, Tennis Courts, Games and Swimming

I was given a good second hand Raleigh cycle with chain guard and basket (£2. 10 shillings) as a reward for passing the scholarship. Arriving at the main entrance to the School, we had to dismount, as no cycling was permitted in the grounds, and walk through to the tennis courts on the north side. The open bike shed had numerous racks and Order Marks were issued if we forgot to padlock a cycle. Miss Garner, very strict, was in charge of all games and gymnastics. There were two courts I think and we had tournaments for those interested. Each girl owned her own racquet. Games Day (once a week) included hockey and running, and was held at Collings Park Grounds at Hartley, as was the Annual Sports Day. We made our own way to the park as it was usually afternoon only. Swimming lessons were held at Mount Wise Pool also by Miss Garner.

New Wing built in July 1939

This was quite an event and we all looked forward to having our lessons in

this modern building which had a very large new kitchen - used for sewing also - and a large science room up over.

Sewing Class

Miss Hulbert took cookery and sewing classes in the huge kitchen, and each girl had to wear an apron which was a square of cream coloured linen, with a corner cut off and placed on the square to form a pocket. All edges and pocket secured in blue blanket stitch. Another item made in sewing class.

Cookery

The kitchen was fitted out with gas and electric cookers around two sides. There was a small pantry with glass door to which girls who misbehaved or talked in lessons were banished. I know the inside of that pantry. All ingredients for the chosen dish had to be brought in by the pupil and the finished article was taken home afterwards. Difficult when the War started with rationing.

British Restaurant in School - Wartime 1939

Just after the War started, these restaurants were opened up in different venues, Plymouth High being one of the most popular. The price of a meal with dessert and a cup of tea was one shilling. I remember the corridor outside the kitchen being full of people, sitting on long forms, waiting to have a meal. The kitchen was where all the food was prepared by Miss Hulbert and helpers, and was then taken into the classroom next door where it was served from a long table by some of the teachers, including Miss Turner the Headmistress, and various pupils. I was chosen with a few others, who were hoping to take Domestic Science as a career, to work with Miss Hulbert in preparing these meals. Rationing was strict, but a different meal was offered each day - i.e. Cottage Pie, Stew etc., and for dessert we filled huge trays with pastry, or pudding, cut into squares, with jam and custard. If we were lucky - currants. Rice pudding was a favourite. I remember the huge tins of dried egg. Cups of tea were served from a cloakroom further down the corridor. The restaurant was extremely popular and queues formed each day.

School Air Raid Shelter

Our air raid shelter was dug down underneath what were the tennis courts. I remember the long alleyways with wooden slatted seats along the walls, where we sat and waited for the "all-clear" siren. Sometimes there was stagnant water on the floor which gave off a funny smell. Each girl had to carry her gas mask at all times, and also a small tin of "iron rations" which consisted of Horlicks Tablets and a small piece of chocolate. This in case the raid lasted several hours. I remember stirrup pumps being placed around the School in case of fire by incendiary bombs. We also had gas mask drill, sitting for five minute intervals wearing our masks. Sticky tapes were criss-crossed on all windows in the School in case of bomb blast.

Plymouth High Girl Guides

Not a large contingent but we were taught first aid and survival techniques etc.

During one meeting, when a Commissioner was visiting, we had to go to the air raid shelter, where we carried on as normal. We all thought it was great fun. We all had the blue uniforms with yellow ties and badge.

Exeter University

Some of the girls who were not evacuated went to this University with Miss Jones and another teacher whose name I can't remember. It was in Pennsylvania Road and we really did enjoy this time. There was a young male student there who used to play "Honeysuckle Rose" to us and of course we all had a crush on him!!!!

School Evacuation to Fowey

As the War progressed and the air raids became more frequent, it was decided to move the School to Fowey in Cornwall. It was not compulsory for girls to go, and my parents wanted me to stay at home, which I did. They were not at all impressed with the fact that I was helping in the restaurant, saying that I didn't go to High School to be in a kitchen!!! So.....as we always did as our parents told us to in those days' I had to leave Plymouth High. I really didn't want to do this as I was hoping to join the Women's' Royal Naval Service when I was old enough, but this caused shock and horror to my father who said that nice girls did not join the Services. So they insisted that I worked in an office (as all nice girls did). I was not very happy about this at all, but as I said, we did as we were told. As Plymouth High School did not include shorthand and typing in it's curriculum, my parents paid for me to have three months training at Pryor's Academy which was situated in a garage at Peverell having been bombed out of it's premises. I passed my exams and started work as a junior at the age of fifteen, in 1941, in The District Traffic Manager's Office, of the Great Western Railway, in Millbay Station, (on the site where the Pavilions building is now situated opposite The Duke of Cornwall Hotel), gradually progressing to a coding and de-coding programme, which I really enjoyed, throughout the War until 1947 when I got married.

Teachers (as far as I can remember)

Miss Turner – Headmistress
Miss Jones – Maths?
Miss Hartland – Music
Miss Cawley – Art
Miss Garner – Gymnastics and Games
Miss Saville – Latin
Miss Keyes – German
Miss Hulbert – Cookery and Sewing
Miss Hartland

Personal Memories

Being at Plymouth High School during the first two to three years of the Second World War was very different from normal school days. At first we had no air raids and we prepared the School with safety measures and watched the air raid shelter being built under the tennis court. If the siren sounded, we picked up our gas masks which were always to hand, and filed into the shelter. As far as possible, lessons continued, but not with much result. If the siren sounded on our way to School, we were told to go to the nearest shelter until we heard the “all-clear”. I still wonder how my parents came to terms with the fact that we were leaving home each day to go to School, not knowing if there was to be a raid while we were all apart. Public transport was still running – and I remember the “clippies” were women, relieving the men for call-up. I used to cycle to School, as did most pupils, as petrol was short and cars were laid up. Others used buses or walked; sometimes as much as three miles or more. Between the ages of 11 and 14 years, we spent most of our leisure time in our homes, no television, and if we went to the cinema we had to be accompanied by an adult if the picture was classified “A”. We listened to the radio – lots of entertainment programmes for the Forces and Workers’ Playtime, and woe betide my brother and me if we spoke during the News programme when Mum and Dad were listening. When the evenings were dark, I had to help to “black out” the windows in case of a raid. I belonged to a Young Peoples’ Union at St Augustine’s Church, Lipson, and we would spend many hours making camouflage nets for guns. Nowadays, girls between those ages are out and about and have boyfriends. I had a boyfriend who lived next door – we cycled and swam at the Hoe swimming pool – he was older than I was and so became a boy seaman in the Royal Navy and we used to write to each other. Later in the War, his ship was sunk and he was taken prisoner by the Japanese to work on the railway and I never saw him again. I remember we were in class waiting for the mistress to arrive for the lesson, and when she did, she told us that Margaret Collings, my special friend, had heard that her father’s ship had been sunk, and that she would not be attending School that week. Nothing much seems to have changed in that sense because we are still at war....but that was the way it was. I remember at one time we had no gas or water and each Sunday we would go to Beechwoods Factory (Sausage and Pies) in Alexandra Road, close to my home, with our small ration of meat and it was cooked with everybody else’s, each with our name on. Because my mum was at an age where she had to do “War work”, she was offered jobs such as a Clippie on the buses or similar, but she did not want to be away from home. She used to go to the Royal Marines Barracks once a week, accompanied by my brother and me, to pick up batches of sailors’ shirts to be sewn together and return them the next week. I don’t remember how much she was paid but I do remember her working late into the night and I had to help her with some of the stitching so we didn’t get out to play at all – not that we were allowed to go out into the street to play, ever. There was always homework to be done too. After School in the Summer, my friend and I would go to the swimming pool with Oxo sandwiches and a bottle of water. We were not expected to wear our School uniform unless it was to attend lessons. My parents could not afford Carona – drinks delivered in square wooden boxes of four bottles – Orange, Ice Cream Soda, Ginger and Lemonade – all with metal and china stops. Only on special occasions. My father was a bus driver on the C20 bus which stopped close to our home and I had to go down to the bus stop with a tin of sandwiches and a flask of tea, and wait for him to come along to collect. At night he would be driving the “tea bus” into the city during the raids to serve the

firemen in the AFS (Auxiliary Fire Service) who were fighting fires. I remember the first air raid at night – my father came into my room and woke me, telling me to dress quickly and go to the Anderson shelter in our garden and I can still feel the fear of that first raid. On my way to School I used to pass bombed buildings but being young accepted it all as part of life. When the School was evacuated to Fowey due to more and more raids, I left and had three months at Pryor's Academy, learning shorthand and typing, and passed an examination into the District Manager's Office at Millbay Station, where The Pavilions are now situated, and remained there until I married in 1947.