

Are you going on your holidays this year?

Recollections of Porthcawl in the 1960's
by Louise Wells

(from Llanbradach)

If you met someone in Llanbradach any time after Whitsunday they would ask you, "Are you going on your holidays this year?" If the answer was, "Yes!" This inevitably meant that you were going to Porthcawl for a two week stay in a caravan.



From Easter onwards my mother would have a cardboard box in the front room in which she would add non-perishable food items. There would be tins of beans and tomatoes, cornflakes, weetabix, packets of biscuits, fruit cake, home-made pickles, tea and coffee. Extra shampoo, toothpaste, soap and toilet roll would all be collected ready for the trip. She would also buy vita pointe conditioner as the salty seawater made the hair knotty and of course some sunscreen. Both were cream in tiny tubes like ointment.



Similarly, my mother would start getting our clothes ready. New vests, underpants, socks and summer pyjamas would be ordered for everyone from Annie Tilley's. Shorts and matching T-shirts, together with anorak's and swimming costumes would come from the catalogue. New sandals would be purchased from Arthur Bennett's, brown ones for my brother and white ones for me and daps of course for the beach. My mother would buy wool to make new cardigans and fabric to make my new summer dresses. The beach towels would also come out.



Since the beginning of the year or maybe the previous summer, hiring arrangements would've been made with Clarence the butcher who owned a 6 berth caravan in Sandy Bay. My father being over six foot, meant we needed a bigger space and the butcher's 'trailer,' as my mother called it, was spotless. My parents didn't like the more commercial Trecco Bay and thought the toilet and shower blocks were cleaner at Sandy Bay. We didn't have a car then so Bryn the oilman would've been given petrol money and extra to drive us there and pick us up on the day of departure. As kids, the drive down seemed to take ages. There was no motorway and there always seemed to be traffic jams as we wound our way down to the sea.

We'd usually been saving for our holidays. Any birthday money in the form of postal orders were cashed and put into our school stamps savings accounts ready for our holidays. So on arrival, as Mammy unpacked, Daddy took us to buy our new buckets and spades and beach balls. Last year's beach toys had been worn out in the dirt in the backyard. Then we'd all be off to the beach, digging in the sand and making castles with moats. We always seemed to run for miles for a paddle when the tide was out. Then as the afternoon drew to a close, back to the caravan for a nice cup of tea. Before you knew it half of the neighbours or people your parents knew were passing by or calling in.



After a shower and a change of clothes we'd usually have our dinner. Mam would cook normal dinner but I remember she used to buy the potatoes ready peeled from a local shop. Any washing up water would run out into a bucket that Dad emptied somewhere. There wasn't a fridge nor a cool box and I remember Dad getting icy cold milk in a carton from a vending machine. The nights would be light so we'd go for a stroll to the beer garden of the pub at Newton Point. It had big fairy lights and we'd have lemonade and crisps with blue twists of salt. In the dark, Daddy would carry us home on his shoulders. Then back in the caravan they would light the gas lights, we'd change into our pyjamas and read our comics. We would doze off to sleep listening to the waves crashing on the shore and the voices of the presenters on the BBC light program as Mammy and Daddy listened to the wireless.

As the dawn broke Mammy and Daddy would be up bundling us into our togs, collecting up our beach gear and taking us straight down the beach. As soon as we were settled on the sand they would be diving through the crashing waves, swimming out for what seemed like miles. Daddy was a strong swimmer and seemed to disappear under the water for ages. The surfers were out too. We just knew them as the lifeguards. Then it would be our turn. I must admit the North Atlantic has never been my favourite ocean. I would emerge after a terrifying half an hour, frozen. Then back on the beach it was time for my mother to pose like Marilyn Monroe for her holiday snaps!



Some mornings we would be woken by the smell of frying bacon and eggs. Cold milk and cornflakes to start and hot tea to finish. In the afternoons we would walk over to the esplanade to the boating lake and try to sail the toy boat. We'd walk along the pier and watch any fishermen. Sometimes we would go the whole way to Rest Bay and back. We would go rambling over the rocks collecting crabs and whelks and things from rock pools. One treat we had almost every afternoon was a Fulgoni's ice cream. If the weather turned bad we'd occasionally go to the pictures.



Friday and Saturday nights were the times for big treats. This was when we had fish and chips or faggots and peas for our dinner from the shop. Then we'd set off for 'the shows' at Coney Beach. Actually, I was never very keen on the rides at all. I tolerated the Merry-go-round, the Cakewalk and The Ghost Train and was terrified of the Water Chute. I did love the candy floss and toffee apples. Then we'd wind our way along the front back to our caravan and listen to all the drunks singing on their way home from the pubs and clubs as we went fast asleep.



My holidays in Porthcawl in the 1960's started a life long love of the sea and beach lifestyle for me. I now live near the sea on the other side of the world in Australia. I often sit on the beach watching the breakers crash on the shore and as I breath the sea air I reminisce.

I see that skinny little kid digging in the sand as the radio played,
'writing love letters in the sand...'

I still love Porthcawl.

