

Joe's Jottings – Sunnybank

The Best Time in History was undoubtedly (for Mum) when her sister (Auntie Diddy) lived in St Albans in a very pleasant house called Sunnybank in Waverley Road. Mum took us there every week when she went shopping; in the language of those two sisters this was known as 'Grooving'.

Auntie Diddy had always had great fun entertaining her brother Humphrey and friends from Cambridge of her son, Cousin Teddy. There were two such friends and they were both called Arthur; to distinguish between the two, they were further called Sarthur and Warthur because the letter S and the letter W were the initial letters of their surnames. And I remember the expression 'Sarthur likes ink' (applied to tea); this meant he liked strong tea, and so do I.

We used to sit in Auntie Diddy's parlour listening to the radio, and we listened on earphones because there was no loudspeaker. The wireless was very much a novelty and was considered one of the wonders of the world.

When we were sitting at the table on one occasion, Auntie Diddy offered Skoj a dish of tomatoes and she said 'Would you like a tomato. Daphne?' and Skoj replied, 'Yes please, the biggest'. For this she was reprimanded by Mum but protested 'There are plenty more biggest'.

Occasionally, Mum and Auntie Diddy wanted a little privacy so they could converse with each other, and to keep me amused Auntie Diddy invented something called 'The Joe Box'. The Joe Box was kept in the drawer of a chest and contained all kinds of bric-a-brac which she considered should be of interest to a youngster, a boy anyway. This box contained a broken-down clockwork alarm clock, a magnetic compass and lots of other things. I did play with it from time to time and managed to keep out of Mum's way and reasonably quiet.

We children used to quarrel constantly when we were young and that was in the days when the worst term of abuse was 'You beast', and 'I bags to do this or that', meaning I reserve first right to do this or that, and 'fains do it'. meaning I won't do it. How selfish we must have been and poor Mum.

I remember when Skoj and I were in bed in the spare room at Holland Moor with Mumps or Measles or some childhood ailment, Skoj threw a glass of water at me with the glass, and on another occasion she hit me with an iron bar. I couldn't tell you where she got the iron bar from but that's the truth.

Worst was when we used to quarrel when we were in the car being driven to St Albans, because that was so off-putting for Mum and dangerous, although there wasn't so much traffic on the roads.

There was a strange campaign between Mum and Auntie Diddy, all very good-natured of course, and it centred around a bar of chocolate which was continually left in certain places for the other to find; this was known as the 'chocolate war', and I certainly cannot remember the origin of it.

When Auntie Diddy came to Holland Moor, which she did quite frequently, the moment she stepped through the door I used to say, 'Will you play duets?' And that dated from the time when I first heard the two sisters play The Spanish Dances of Moszkowski, which were delightful and

very tuneful dances in the Spanish style. Mum and Auntie Diddy were both very good pianists, and played these duets extremely capably.