

## Mutual Antipathy

I was a very good child; everyone said it, my parents, my neighbours and my teachers. So it must have been correct.

I went to school in Tottenham, behind the church opposite the Spurs football ground, in what would have been a convent school if Hitler hadn't dropped the bomb that blew up the convent part. The nuns weren't best pleased as they had to walk in from Edmonton.

I enjoyed the elevated position of being thought of as very good by one and all until my eighth birthday. The day had started out brilliantly; I had walked to school with my sister Gellybeans and met our friend Diane; our mums and Diane's younger siblings following behind. My sister was only a year older than me and Diane six months and had up to this year Diane had always been in my class. This year Diane was in my sister's class, but she wanted to play with me at school today as I was having my birthday tea at my Nan's tonight. We agreed that we would all play together after lunch.

My friends from my own class wanted to play with me at lunch-time, but I said I had promised to play with Gelly & Diane.

Towards the end of lunch a couple of dinner ladies asked me what I was had been doing today. I thought that it made a nice change being spoken to by them; they usually dealt with the boys letting off steam. They must know that it is my birthday and they like to talk to you when you are eight. I told them all about my day and showed them the wrist-watch my granddad had given me this morning. I was feeling rather unique.

As soon as we got into class we all sat down. Our teacher was new and amiable enough, she asked me to stand up. I felt very important, she must know it is my birthday too, I arose with enthusiasm, everybody wanted to talk to me today.

She asked the class who had been playing with me.

My friend Eileen said she was playing with me at morning playtime.

"Who was playing with Patricia at lunchtime?" she said.

Nobody answered.

She turned to me, “Who were you playing with at lunchtime, Patricia?”

“My sister Geraldine and friends from her class,” I said proudly.

“I don't believe that for a minute, nobody plays with their sister at school. They play with them at home.”

“Well, I was playing with my sister.” I came back with.

“Don't lie to me, Patricia. I know you didn't have anyone to play with at lunch-time. You hit an infant and made her cry, you are a very nasty child?” She said, “No wonder nobody wanted to play with you.”

“I'm not lying, I didn't hit anyone. Everybody wanted to play with me” I said in surprise at the unexpected attitude she displayed. Teachers had always spoken nicely to me before. This was a total shock what was happening.

“Don't lie” she said. “Nobody likes a liar, do we class? Just because you didn't have anyone to play with doesn't mean you can hit a small child. Now tell the truth.”

“I am telling the truth, I always do.” I said.

“Come on now. You were seen by a top junior, they know right from wrong, unlike you. You should know better at your age.”

“I know right from wrong and I never do anything wrong.”

I couldn't believe it. I always tell the truth. I thought everyone knew I was a good girl. I'd even had my first confession and then I had to make up something to confess.

“Why can't you just own up and we can all get on with the lesson instead of wasting our time with your lies.” She stood there delivering her diatribe; I stood there staring in disbelief. I started fumbling into my memory; perhaps I'd accidentally kicked a child while we were skipping. No, surely not. I couldn't even recall seeing any infants at lunch-time.

After what seemed a lifetime of verbal abuse from the teacher, the school secretary came in with a top junior.

“Was it Patricia you saw hit the infant?” the older girl was asked.

“Yes,” She answered firmly. The grin forming on my teacher's face lasted until it was followed by, “but not that one standing up. It was a Patricia from another class.”

The colour drained from my teacher. “Sit down.” She said to me in anger.

By this time I was thinking that she hated me as much as I hated her.

At the end of the day I was eager to get home, but no, she spoiled that too. She called me out of the line as I was going past her desk. “Let’s not let what happened today stop us from being friends.” She had the nerve to say. It was ages before she stopped talking and me not answering. I didn't answer. Come to that, I never answered her again. I made a promise to myself that the only time I would speak in front of her was when I was called out to read (well, I didn't want to spoil my education, did I).

When I got outside the classroom all my friends had been collected and I'd missed saying goodbye to them.

Sometime later in the year we were having craft in the afternoon. There were all manner of things over our desks. I loved craft; happily I got on with my work. I began to feel unwell so I sat down for a bit, but it didn't help. I thought with luck I would be able to see the day out. Luck wasn't with me that day, I began to feel worse. I didn't know what to do. If I went up and told her I didn't feel well, I would be letting go of my promise to keep quiet. If I did tell her, she wouldn't believe me anyway. While I was working my way through this problem, my lunch decided to make a re-appearance. I was surprised how far it dispersed itself. I was taken out of the class to wait for home time.

When I returned to school a few days later I was relieved to find my desk had been cleaned up.

She started again as soon as we sat down, about how terrible it was for the cleaners to clean up my vomit. Why couldn't I have said I was feeling ill and gone to the cloakroom? How I was the most revolting child she had ever met.

So much for her wanting to be friends. She was the most revolting teacher I had ever met, so I smiled sweetly at her. I said nothing.

My school had a re-union about fifteen years ago. I declined the invitation, just in case she was there.

After over fifty years my animosity towards her has not abated.