

A Trip to the Seaside

by Keith H Lloyd

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A Trip to the Seaside

It was a very sunny morning, not a cloud in the sky. The Orley family were very excited they were going on a school trip to Southend-on-Sea.

It was 1923 and school trips were almost unheard of for children in the dock area of Silvertown where they lived. The two boys, Bob aged 17 and Albert aged 14, were no longer of school age but it was for the whole family and so they were allowed to go along with their two sisters, Agnes aged 13 and Ivy aged 11. Even little Danny, almost 2, was allowed to go provided Mum went with him. Well Mum didn't say no to that. But certainly it was a rush for her, what with preparing the sandwiches and ensuring the kids were all wearing clean underclothes.

"You must have your best clean clothes on in case of an accident, I'll not be 'aving neighbours talk about us."

Danny was still in nappies, so he needed changing. Yes, it certainly was a rush. The girls were a great help to her. She ignored their customary bickering with each other- they always agreed to disagree.

They had to be at the school at 9 am to meet the coach and they were running so as not to be late. Ivy with her fair hair and Agnes with her red hair flowing behind them struggled with the food bags and Mrs Orley, a slightly built lady carry Danny, was finding it an ordeal. Fortunately her brother's wife, Mrs Emily Gee known as (Nurse Don), was on hand to take the strain. She took Danny and his napkin bag from her; babies were no problem, they were her nursing profession, she had brought Danny into the world among many others.

The boys were way ahead. Bob had a day off from work. He was a merchant seaman, like his Dad. He would be going away shortly, so he wasn't going to miss this trip. Albert had just left school and would be starting work in a factory shortly. So he was very keen to go on the trip. Also their cousins, aunt Emily's children, were going and that pleased them all.

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There were so many families at the school that it was soon obvious that there wouldn't be enough room on the coach for everyone.

"I'm not going," said Mrs Orley, "I'll not have Danny squashed up in that thing".

"That's alright", said Emily, "I'll have him on my lap"

But there was a great cheer from the crowd when a second coach arrived. The coaches were open top type called 'Brakes' - no one knew why but that didn't matter now there was enough room for all. So they piled in and pretty soon they were merrily on their way, singing 'Down by the Old Bull and Bush' and others like 'It's a long way to Tipperary' attracting glances from pedestrians and frightening the birds as they journeyed through the Essex countryside. They passed through the villages of Rainham, Purfleet and Stifford before stopping for a break at the foot of 'Bread and Cheese Hill' in the hamlet of Pitsea. Then it was on to Southend through Benfleet and Leigh-on-Sea.

By the time they reached their final destination all the family were famished Albert said, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse" "Well you're in luck" said his Mum, fortunately no one believed her.

They settled themselves down on the beach and as the tide was out the boys wanted to wade out to the waters edge, 'wade' was the operative word because the waters edge was at least a mile away and to get there meant wading through a sea of mud and sand. But that didn't deter them. So after lemonade and sandwiches they set out,

"I'm coming with you," said Agnes.

Ivy said, "I'm staying here"

"Don't go too far" said Mrs Orley "and look out for Danny he is following you" Well they did go too far and after about half a mile they turned to find that Danny was no longer with them.

They hurried back and arrived at the beach drenched in mud.

Danny was nowhere to be seen. Mrs Orley was frantic and it was

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fortunate that aunt Emily was around to take charge. She reported the missing child to the Police who patrolled the promenade with megaphone loud speakers requesting the people to be on the look-out for a two-year-old boy.

After some considerable time, a sighting was reported from the Kersall, a fun fair area on the far side of the road opposite the beach. The whole family including aunt Emily's family made their way across the road to the fun fair and there they found Danny fast asleep on a cardboard box. He was fine apart from requiring changing; it was a wonder to all, that he wasn't hurt crossing the busy sea front thoroughfare.

The boys and Agnes were severely reprimanded by Mrs Orley and Aunt Emily and sent to the washrooms to clean themselves up. When they arrived home no mention was made to their Father about the incident, except they said everyone had a lovely time.

The family never visited Southend together again.