

## Play

We never really did family 'games' as such. All fun was to be had outside in the rambling unkempt wonderful garden. The secret hidey hole in the bamboo thicket, the see saw that was a piece of scaffolding timber on a tree stump. That was really uncomfortable, but fun. I was always the fattest and my end went down first. Trees were always top of the list. I remember dragging a wooden ladder from the old garage and propping it up against a tree trunk desperate to see what was making that extraordinary noise. I can see now the sea of eggy yellow diamonds inside waiting for breakfast. If I put my hands over my forehead to shield the light I could see that these baby birds didn't even have feathers! My eyes used to bulge in amazement. How incredible were they. The sense of wonder and awe at the power of the natural world. It wasn't playing as such, more like exploring.

My tree house was in an apple tree. Sweet juicy little red nuggets of deliciousness, I think they were called Beauty of Bath. Charles, my brother, twenty months older than me had his in the walnut tree just to the left of the green shed. I can't remember how he got up into his tree house, was there a ladder there too? I scrambled up to my simple platform (probably an old door) from the ground just as the trunk split into three sections two foot off the ground. How amazing for us each to have our own secret outposts. Near enough to whistle and sing, far enough to get away. We must have invited each other over for Ribena in milk and chocolate fingers at elevenses served up in Christening mugs. It must have been before the days of strawberry Nesquik.

There was the Old Fort in the woods, all three of us children used to go there with two dogs, Ellen, our helper and the pet goose wandering along behind. It was an old disused cement works, several rectangular swimming pool shapes all empty and longing for new life. Broken wires dangerously poking from one wall served as the TV aerial for a buried gypsy caravan for my then baby sister. We used to dare each other to jump into the chasms. At the back there was a tin corrugated echo shed. Oak saplings crawled their way around the distorted foundations. Thinking about it now it was a health and safety nightmare, stiff wires, blood from previous grazed knees and drops several feet deep. We loved it. There was never anybody else there.

The old goose hut, a black weather boarded fairy house in a field next door to the veg patch. We spent hours in there, gathering up toys and weeds and no doubt made several pots of mud soup for lunch. The only thing lacking though was electric light.

Being an adventurous pair we both went up to the main road one day and stole cats' eyes from the central reservation. This was the A2, the main road from London to Dover, in the 1960s clearly there wasn't much traffic.

I remember washing and eating a piece of Spam under the outside tap which I found in a pile of builder's sand and remembering how delicious it was, but the best game was when we did some surgery to one of my dolls. This involved a sharp kitchen knife to enlarge holes at both ends of the doll's alimentary canal. Charlie fitted the garden hose into her mouth. I laughed so much that I was sick.