



Penny Bishop, Neasden

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Interview by Elisabeth Blanchet with Penny Bishop

Transcribed by Sonia Zhuravlyova March 2018

Elisabeth: If you could tell me your name?

My name now is Penny Bishop, but when I lived in the prefab in Neasden, my name was Penny George. I lived there with my mum and dad and my elder sister. And we had a lovely garden four or five fruit trees. And I left home in 1966, when I got married. But my parents were there for little while longer, a year or so before they moved to NW2. There were about 15 prefabs in our area, they were two bedrooms, but they all had fridges and well fitted out kitchens and fitted draws and cupboards. In the main bedroom which also had a laundry area, where you opened the top draw to put your dirty washing in and then you took it all out from the bottom draw, which was bit different then. And the whole of that side was cupboards, small cupboards, a wardrobe and the laundry area. In my sister's and my bedroom we had a fitted cupboard, a wardrobe I suppose, which now I realise was quite small but we fitted all our clothes in. Where now I have a house, with three bedrooms and I take up all the wardrobes, but that can't be helped. The kitchen was large enough to eat in for the four of us, a large larder, and as I say a fridge, an electric cooker and quite a large cupboard with draws underneath for crockery etc and tablecloths. And also a shelf above the cooking area and the washing-up area, where we had stored the saucepans. My mother also had a Hoover washing machine, which fitted into underneath, not underneath the sink, where the drainer was. And a back door that went out to a nice garden, where there was a shed, washing line... And I don't know whether if this a little bit of information you can delete if you don't want. I always remember being told I was outside in my pram once and somebody knocked on the door and said a pram's been blown over. Of course I don't remember that, but it was very lucky that they were large prams, and I lived to tell the tale. Anything else?

Yes, was there a sense of community on your prefab street?

Yes, because most people were very similar ages, and we were friends with people all around us actually, I could mention their names but perhaps they don't want me to, I don't know, I would love to be in contact with them again. One in



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particular, where we used to go out quite regularly. Most of them did have children similar age to us, and there was one [set of] twins, Gwen and Ann, and we used to get into little not scrapes but adventures, as you do when you're young. And one time, because my sister was four years older than me, which I mentioned, we climbed up to the roof, putting a chair on something else, standing on top of the door of the kitchen and climbing up. Which was fine, I got up there and I was very young, but I couldn't get down again. It was very difficult to get down, but somehow or other I managed it. But a neighbour did tell my mother, I think my sister might have, got into a little bit of trouble because of that, but nothing too much. And it was just off, on Neasden Lane so we had a bus going past or several buses, going up and down and there was pub just down the road, which was nice, we used to get ice cream from them at the time. And we had lovely large lilac bushes that went round the garden. So it was still very secluded in the front.

And were people who lived in other houses looking a bit down on the prefabs?

I think, my mother thought that, but in actual, so we felt it a little but I don't think there was particularly, no. Because people were very grateful just to have anything after the war. And so as children we didn't really notice anything like that, no, we went to the local school and everyone was quite friendly. Oh, and also we had an elm tree in the front garden, and the people opposite, who we had to be quite friendly with, because they had daughters of similar age to us, they said it was swaying a bit in the wind. So I got a photograph of when it was cut down, and it totally blocked Neasden Lane, until they cleared it from the road, and then there the couple of friends who lived in the prefabs near us, well in the same group and myself sitting on it until it was actually taken away, I think I would look about six or seven. But now I can only remember it being happy and the sun shining, but of course it didn't shine all the time. But we did have, as I mentioned, we did have apple trees, which was very good. And one year we also had a plum tree. We had so many plums on it, my sister and I, went round knocking at the other prefabs asking if they wanted any plums and so we collected their washing-up bowls, filled with plums and took it to them. But that is the only year because we didn't get any hardly before them and never any after that.

After that, so that was a unique combination of things...

It was just a very good year for plums but I remember that.

But what happened at the end, your parents stayed till 1968?

Yes about that, I had move in 1966. It would have been about 1968, and then they were rehoused in a flat overlooking Gladstone Park, which is a lovely park, and they were very fortunate they were on the second floor, just a one bedroom place because that was needed then. But it had a balcony, which I suppose they



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would have been, and you always think your parents are older from a young age, I suppose they may have been in there late 60s or early 70s. So it did suit them, because they had the greenery from the park and a balcony for the sunshine and a garage, if they wanted one. So they did like that, sadly they both died now, but they were there until the end.

Did they regret the prefab, were they nostalgic for the prefab?

I don't think they did really because my mother, her family they had a farm originally so she was used to more room. And so I think she thought it might be a bit down living there, but my father was more evenly I suppose, can't think of the word, about equality. And they paid for whatever rent it was all the time. And it was a happy, a happy place to live I can only think of being happy, rather than sad.

What do you think made you happy about living in the prefab, was it the architecture, the design or everything?

Now I think of it was very cold, but I feel the cold a lot more now, but when we lived there we icicles on the outside, we also had so the windows were all frosted up. But I can't actually remember being cold, because as children we don't really notice it as much, do you? But now we are so used to central heating and everything, but we did have a fire and that did heat the hot water, or else you could just turn the water on to heat like an emersion, and it had airing cupboard and ample space really. Happy times!