



# Anne Bradford Remembers.....

## Starting A Playschool

People were so kind donating expensive toys that older children had outgrown. Crabbs Cross school donated half a dozen little old desks and a dozen tiny chairs. We had so much equipment that at the end of each session it was difficult to fit everything into the small room given to us for storage.

The morning was usually divided into four, first the table toys, secondly, milk and a bicky or slice of apple, then activity toys – bikes, slides, trampoline etcetera and finally, a story and a sing song. The only child who gave us any trouble was my three-year old daughter who had the richest vocabulary in swear words that anyone had ever heard, We couldn't understand how she had acquired this until one day, when the family were out in the car, my husband got stuck behind a woman driver.

I was supposed to be the supervisor but in actual fact the playschool revolved round Aunty June. (June Lee). She was fantastic at dealing with people. An infant would arrive bawling its eyes out and after a couple of minutes with Aunty June the child would be laughing.

The mums were always bursting with ideas and suggestions for things to do. Aunty June's husband was a part-time coach driver so he always knew the best and cheapest trips. We went to Dudley Zoo (where we lost a child) and every year we entered a float in the carnival. One year we did 'Bedtime Story' and won first prize in section three. We won several prizes for our art work.

One of the mums was keen on cooking and used to come in to give cookery demonstrations. Chocolate cornflakes were the most popular although they got a bit messy if the chocolate hadn't set properly

I must pay a tribute to Reverend Rogers who was always ready to help. For example, I discovered that the little girls loved drawing brides so I decided to have a mock wedding complete with bride and appropriate songs such as 'I'm getting married in the morning'. Rev Rogers said that we could have the church for free one Friday so we invited the mums and dads. About four days before the event the Rev Rogers came in and said he needed the church as he had a christening.

I was nearly in tears, he had forgotten about my wedding. When I reminded him he said, 'No matter, we'll have the wedding first and the Christening afterwards' so that's what we did. The two children got married one end of the church then we rushed down to the other end near the font where Aunty June was waiting with a baby doll.

When choosing the main characters in a play or an event, we had to be careful not to create any jealousy between mums so we always chose children who had gone through a difficult time, perhaps the mother had been ill or the father had lost his job or a pet had died.

We only had real trouble once. It all started when the Treasurer looked out of her kitchen window and saw two women in her front garden picking her daffodils.

*Images from Anne Bradfords personal collection*



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***There's one of three children painting in the playschool. This was used in an advertisement for the crayons***

She knocked on the window then went outside. They said to her, 'Sorry about your flowers but they looked so beautiful we just couldn't resist them'. The next day, our Treasurer was just telling us about them when they turned up! They walked in with their two children in tow. They said, 'We want to put their names down for playschool'. I said, 'I'm ever so sorry but we're full up with a long waiting list'. They said, 'Ring Social Services'. So I phoned the Social Services lady and to my amazement she said I could take them.

The following day, the children were dumped outside the church, at eight in the morning with no mums in sight, I phoned the social services lady to complain. The following morning the children were there at eight o'clock, in my front garden. Another call to the Social Services representative. After that, they were quite law abiding except that nobody collected them after playschool. The procedure is that you have to phone the police and report an abandoned child. The police always had the same answer, 'We've nowhere to keep them here, can you have them?'. I didn't mind because the children were so cute, they were no problem at all. The one little boy thought we were the richest family in Redditch because we had ice cream in our freezer. Then one Wednesday, at half past twelve all the children had gone home except for one little boy who was still looking for his coat. I was all for phoning the police but Aunty June knew better. She looked through the register and made a list of the names and telephone numbers of the five largest boys in the playschool. Then she phoned up their mums and asked them if they had an old coat their son had outgrown. She collected one of the coats then she drove round the roads looking for our young thief. There he was, just as she suspected, playing in the road in the missing coat. She explained that he'd taken the wrong coat, removed the coat that he was wearing and replaced it by the coat she had just brought. Then the original coat was returned to its rightful owner. Everybody was happy and nobody had been charged.

About a month later, the children failed to turn up to playgroup. They didn't turn up the next day, either and on the third day I phoned our contact at Social Services. She said, 'They're not coming back, they don't like it there, they say you're all too stuck up'. Stuck up, we couldn't believe it! And after all we had done for them!

Looking back, I think that that was the happiest time of my life. I would have stayed there for ever except for the fact that the pay was low and at home we were having financial difficulties. Sadly, I had to get a proper job teaching at an inner city school.

Anne Bradford

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