



Sanatorium. Chandlers Ford.

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CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF SANATORIUM LIFE











## Childhood Memories of Sanatorium Life

My name is Alice May Cawte and I was born on 9th January 1927. I can't remember much about that day of course but I was told by my dear mother that it was in Gosport. She and my Dad had rooms over a shop in the High Street. The shop was owned by a lady who sold all kinds of things that fishermen would need. I am now 76 years old and have visited the High Street which has of course changed and largely rebuilt post war and the site of the fishermen's shop is now a clothes shop, Q & S.

The next place my parents moved to was Charlotte Court in Gosport but I can only remember a little about it. I was there until I was 5. In October 1932 my father died of tuberculosis at 'The Mount', Bishopstoke. My mother also had tuberculosis and the two of us were sent to Chandlers Ford Sanatorium, Eastleigh (I was quite healthy but there was no one to look after me). The building to me as a little girl of five looked huge and I had to say my goodbyes to my mum as she was going one way in the big building and me the other. I was not frightened because there were other children there and the nurses were so very kind. I wore my own clothes there so it gave me some feeling of home. There were iron drop side cots all round this big ward and I remember very big windows all wide open. I was given a bath and put into one of these cots and told I was to stay in the cot for quite some time. I seem to remember being told that I was undernourished and was to stay in bed until I was built up again. Also I think it was the easiest way for the nurses to control young children. Sometimes I was allowed out to wave to my mum through a window, the nurse would then take me to the little farm in the grounds where there were pigs. I remember an old man who we used to call 'Baa Lamb' and who would sweep the wards every day. I don't know why he was given the nickname as he was already called that when I first met him but I remember him as a small man, hunched up somewhat and with a mass of white hair. Perhaps a child at one time thought he looked like a lamb and the name stuck. Possibly of course his name could have been Mr Lamb or Mr Shepherd. Every day Sister Church as she was called came to see us and made sure we ate everything on our plates, she used to scare us a bit with her big white cap. She would take our temperature under our arm when small and I had never seen a thermometer in my young life so that scared me. The first time I wasn't sure what taking temperature meant which was also scary. I can still remember the ward, I had my sixth birthday there and I was made a fuss of. I had a cake with candles and a card from Mum and also the

nurses but no present I was very happy really. I also remember, as well as Sister Church, a very kind man who would come and see us and pat us on the head. He was Dr Hart. There was a box of toys in the ward that were shared by us all but I'm unable to remember details

I'm not sure how long we stayed in the sanatorium this time, we went in after Dad died in October 1932 and I was there for my sixth birthday but I was certainly back in Gosport for my seventh.

This was not to be the last time I was in Chandlers Ford Sanatorium. In 1937 my mother was very ill and at the time we were living in a new council house but the previous five years living in dreadful conditions made my poor mother worse. I myself was surviving but was suffering from malnutrition so we were off again to the sanatorium. It still looked a very big building to me with big windows everywhere. I had to say goodbye to my mum as she was going to one end of the building where the women's wards were. I didn't know at the time but that was to be the last time I was to see my mum. The other end of the building where I was, was the children's wards, the oldest girl in the ward was 15. I remember going up this big stone staircase and at the top were 2 big toilets with green doors. All the walls were green at the bottom and a sort of cream at the top. I then went into a big ward with beds (not cots) either side. My bed was at the top of the ward with a big door at the left of my bed which led into a big bathroom with a very large bath and wash basins. Baths were taken singly but there was always a nurse there, I can't remember how often though, girls first and then boys. For washing we girls were all in the bathroom together but had to take it in turns at the wash basin. Once again big windows everywhere and all open. From there was another big door which opened on to the boy's ward which led out to another landing with 2 big toilets, from here there was another big stone staircase leading down to the infant's ward which I was in at the age of 5. All the wards had small fireplaces at one end but I never saw them used.

I was given a bath and put straight in my nice bed, everything was so new to me but I never once felt frightened as the nurses were so very kind and there were girls of my age, 10 years. We were each given a toy when we went in and mine was a teddy bear but the legs came off. A nurse sewed them back but the wrong way round. I loved that ted but had to hand him back when I left.

Later on that day Dr Hart, who I remembered, came and examined me and told me I was to eat all the nice food I was going to have. Next thing I can remember was Sister Church coming in the ward with a big trolley full of things and telling me I



was not to cry or make a noise because it would only be for a little while. The she stuck a needle in my arm to take some of my blood. Every time I saw her again with the trolley I would start to cry and sometimes all she was going to do was to comb our hair with a special comb as she called it to keep our hair nice and clean but we were all a bit scared of poor Sister Church and her trolley.

Every morning we would be wakened by the nurses about 7 o'clock with a call of 'dinky time girls' which meant we all had to go to the toilet. The same thing happened on the boy's side with 'dinky time boys'. Then back into bed for breakfast which was porridge, a boiled egg, boiled milk and bread. After breakfast we would have a wash and clean our teeth while the nurses made our beds, from then on we would be given puzzles to do, books to read and colouring books and pencils. I would sometimes write little notes to my mum which the nurses would pass on to her. I never did see my mum again as she was too ill even for me to see her through the window like I did the first time we were here. Poor Dr Hart would do his rounds and first thing we would ask was could we be 'marked up' and he would look at our chart at the bottom of the bed and say next time perhaps' but most of the time we had to stay in bed. When he did mark us up we were allowed to go to church and go on walks. We then had all our meals downstairs where there was a very big room with a big fireplace that I never saw lit, and two very long tables and benches either side, the boys sat one side and girls the other. We were only allowed to mix downstairs and not in the wards. Sometimes we were told we could sit where we liked which we thought was great fun. At the end of the table a nurse with her big flowing hat would sit and say grace after which we could eat but no talking.

One day Dr Hart took three of us in his car to a place to be x-rayed, we thought this was great fun. There was one or two boys. On the way back he bought us some sweets because we had been good but it was to be a secret. I don't remember the kind of sweets but Dr Hart allowed us to choose.

After breakfast we all had a big spoon of Cod Liver Oil and Malt and once a week we would have a spoonful of white stuff that tasted of peppermint and that we were told was to clean our tummies. It all depended on how long we were marked up but we would have to do a few jobs like cleaning the brass rim around the long table that was in the middle of the ward. The boys did the same on their ward. Help the nurses putting the used dishes on a trolley from those who were still confined to their beds. We had no schooling as such but the nurse who sat with us during meals would give us paper and pencils and we would do a few sums and

our times tables. She would read us stories and poems. One of our jobs for us big girls was to read stories to the little ones on the ground floor wards. We had a meal about 1 o'clock which was like a big soup with lots of vegetables and lots of chicken, for afters it was things like rice pudding, suet puddings and custard and always lots of apples and sometimes an orange and with this once a day 2 sweets each. If at any time we had done something naughty such as getting out of bed when we shouldn't, running around the ward, general childish misbehaviour and worst crime of all not eating everything on our plates, our punishment was no sweets for 4 days. After that meal we all had to go to our beds and we had to do nothing but rest, no talking to each other but just rest. After our rest we had our tea time although I don't remember ever drinking tea, it was always boiled milk and a piece of cake. After our rest we used to go to feed the little pigs with 'Baa Lamb', the pigs were in the grounds of the sanatorium, there were chickens as well, 'Baa Lamb' had a wooden building in the grounds near the little farm. We boys and girls loved doing this. 'Baa Lamb' was a very dear little man and we all loved him. Once a week he would go into the town and if we had a bit of money we would ask him to buy things like pencils and notebooks, he was never allowed to buy sweets. The last meal of the day was also very filling like big bowls of soup or cottage pie, we had fresh fruit or a cooked pudding and jam after. After our last meal we all stood by our benches and said our prayers. I remember this prayer very well, we sang it so the little ones would hear

Hands together softly so  
Little eyes shut tight  
Father just before we go hear our prayer tonight.  
We are all your children dear  
This is what we pray.  
Keep us safe til morning light  
And through all the day

This prayer I taught my three girls and also my 6 grandchildren.

By this time it was about 6.30 and we all had to go upstairs to our wards, have a wash, clean our teeth and be in bed by 7. We could talk for a while or read but about 8 o'clock a nurses voice would call up the stairs 'Dinky time girls' and likewise the other side 'Dinky Time boys' which meant we all had to go to the toilet. There was like a big room that separated the girls ward from the boys ward. After we had our 'dinky time' we would meet up with the boys just to have fun playing simple games such as 'I Spy' or sometimes just talking. We weren't supposed to

but I think the nurses turned a blind eye as long as we weren't too noisy. After a while the day or night nurses would come round to see we were all tucked into our bed for the night and open any window that might be closed up, the windows were always open. I didn't feel the cold but then living in Gosport wasn't very warm

There was of course visiting times and while the others had people come to see them no one came to visit me. I was given toys and books at these times and sometimes the nurses would take me downstairs.

Every Sunday after our breakfast, which as I have said before, consisted of porridge which I didn't like, but I knew if I didn't eat it and drink the hot milk I would not be able to go on our outing, which was a 2 hour walk through the woods in the grounds with nurses every Sunday. Sometimes we would have bread and jam which I loved. Apart from porridge I ate everything because they did feed us well and we all loved the food. I was very happy in Chandlers Ford Sanatorium, the nurses, Matron Baker were so very kind to us. Most of the children had TB glands which had to be cleaned every day, this was done in the morning. One boy had a very big knee and he was telling me that they were going to put him to sleep and when he woke up it would not hurt any more but he had to leave the San and go somewhere else to have it done. He was a bit upset, not because of the knee, but of leaving the San and his friends.

On a Sunday we would go to the little chapel and sit at the back, I used to look to see if my mum would be there but she was too ill to be out. After chapel one of the nurses would take us for a walk in the woods close by. I remember we used to look for chestnuts, we loved those outings. We would then come back for lunch and then our afternoon rest. One morning after breakfast, we all of us had breakfast in bed, a nurse told me to dress because Matron wanted to see me. Matron Baker was a very nice person but she looked very sad when she saw me and said, you know your Mummy has been very sick don't you. Well she's not sick any more because last night Jesus came for her and she is now in heaven and then she gave me a big hug. I often think how hard that she had to tell a 10 year old that she was now an orphan.

They then had the task as what to do with me. My father had a younger brother who was married, he had no children of his own and had promised my dad he would always look after me if ever I was left alone. Uncle Bert came to visit me, he was very nice but as I had never seen him or Aunty Clara before I didn't really want to live with them and I told Matron so but that I wanted to stay at Chandlers Ford with them for ever. She explained to me why I couldn't stay there and would





have a nice new life. At night while I laid in bed I used to hear trains in the distance and used to think I wonder where they are going to , I had never been on a train. I didn't know it was in the next week or so that Uncle Bert and Aunty Clara would be coming to fetch me and I would be on the train to go and live in Watford. I cried when I left Chandlers Ford, all the nurses and Matron and Sister Church gave me a hug and told me to be happy and be good. I loved the time I was there , all the good food, care and love I received from there , I'll never forget.

Both times mum was admitted to the sanatorium I had to go in as well, there was no one to look after me with mum gone and I suppose it was either that or the workhouse, plus I was suffering from malnutrition, a fact that was remarked upon during a medical examination when in my 20's

The Matron told my uncle when he came to collect me that if I had been left in the Gosport environment any longer I would probably have contracted tuberculosis as well. As it was I was clear

ALICE MAY HOARE (MAISIE)

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