

*Bread and Cheese ... and Sevensies*  
*A glimpse of childhood in Essex 1937-1941*

by

**Doreen Pearce**



**Copyright © Doreen Pearce 1995, 1998**

**Published in electronic form (1998) by  
Nash Information Services Inc.  
1975 Bel-Air Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario, K2C 0X1 Canada  
Fax: (613) 225 6553  
Email: [mnash@nashinfo.com](mailto:mnash@nashinfo.com)**

**ISBN: 0-88769-012-2**

## Feeding the Family

There were several fruit trees in the back garden, Dr Harvey and Russet apples, plum, damson and greengage. Mum used the fruit to make jam and to stew for pudding, with custard. We all had big appetites and we filled up the corners with bread and jam. She made pounds and pounds of plum and greengage jam. We much preferred strawberry jam but we didn't grow strawberries. We never ever bought vegetables. Dad grew enough for the whole family in the back garden. When he was offered the small garden beside the chapel as an allotment he leapt at it. It took a lot of vegetables to keep us going. He grew all our potatoes too, but not in the garden. The farmer where he worked let him, and the other men, grow potatoes on the headlands of his fields.

In September we all went blackberrying. Mum took this very seriously, "Don't keep hopping about from bush to bush. Stay at one bush until you've picked it clean. Look my can's almost full." But we preferred flitting from bush to bush and eating half of what we picked. Mum used the blackberries with apples for jam but she also made them into wonderful blackberry and apple puddings, boiled for hours on the oil stove until the suet crust was a delicate brown. One Saturday she made a particularly large one, so big that she thought we couldn't possibly need a meat course as well. When Dad came home from work we ran down to the gate to greet him, shouting:

"Dad, Dad, we aren't going to have any dinner today, only pudding, Mum says."

Mum was furious because we had let the neighbours know what we were having for dinner. The baker came every day from the Co-op Bakery in Dovercourt. We had the same man for years, a quietly spoken man called Arthur, who kept his customers up to date on local gossip. He walked down the side of the house with his basket of bread, put his head inside the back door and shouted,

"Hello. It's Arthur. How many today?"

The milk came from Dimbolls Farm and was delivered from a small yellow van. Mrs. Garnham brought a small hand churn to the door and measured out the milk with a dipper and poured it into our jug. Boyes the Butcher, from Wix, called twice a week, Tuesdays and Saturdays.

"What do you fancy for the weekend?" he asked on Tuesday, pulling out his long narrow order book.

"Will you have a nice piece of brisket?" asked Mum. She liked brisket because it was cheap. We hated it. Mum simmered it in a saucepan and then, made us drink the water it had been cooked in, cool and beaded with fat. "Drink it up," she said, when we protested, "it's full of goodness." Behind the shed stood a home-made sawing horse and a solid chopping block. Once a year, if he was lucky, Dad would be given half a tree. This was usually up on the farm and he would have to bring the branches home as best he could. Sometimes he was lucky and could borrow a horse and cart. He sawed the branches into logs so that we could have a log fire in the front room until the following Spring.

Whenever we went out for a walk with Mum she would look out for small dead branches to bring home for the fire.

"Help pick up some of these small dead sticks," she would say. "They'll save your father having to chop sticks to light the fire." Mum lit the kitchen range with newspaper and sticks and polished it with black lead before we got up in the morning. It was glowing with red coals by the time we came down. Sometimes we went into Stour Wood with the pram, 'wooding'. We looked for dead branches which Mum broke over her knee into smaller pieces, and we came home with the pram piled with fire wood.