

# SHOES IN JANET'S

## IN HER SHOES

BY BLOWN FUSE ©

### VERBATIM STORIES FROM THE WOMXN OF THURROCK

#### JANET

Employment came to East Tilbury for people who were needy and everyone from all the surrounding districts got on their feet or bikes to get there. It was like a gift from heaven. A little kingdom was springing up surrounded by green pastures intermingled with poplar trees, fresh air and a feeling of well being. Everyone wanted to be part of it.

I was born on 2nd August 1936 in Chadwell-St-Mary. We moved to Bata in 1937 when my Father took a job there. Around 1941, my Father had a big, serious operation and following this, as he could not join up for the war, he wanted to work for the war effort, so we moved away from Batas and moved in with my Aunt in Grays, as my uncle was away at war. At this time, still being very young, I had to move schools as St Joseph's school was now too far away. I remember seeing my Nan and Grandad regularly and two uncles who had TB. They lived in a room upstairs for 13 years before they died. My uncle Freddie lived there too, though he died in the war when his ship was sunk.

Eventually, my Father once again worked for Batas and they moved back onto the estate. Now the school was open and I started on the first day. I remember a photo of around 20 children that started that day. I began to make lots of friends and remember bluebelling, blackberry picking and playing on the farmer's haystacks and ditch jumping! At the end of the war we had a bonfire in the avenue outside our house and someone brought their piano out onto the street to play.

# IN JANET'S SHOES

Czech men and women were in charge and they were very efficient with their own way of doing things – very different from English firms. Do this! Do that! was the order of the day. However, they provided all kinds of facilities for the workers and their families: a cinema, swimming pool, tennis club, children's swings, accommodation for dancing classes, women's clubs, gymnastics, arts and crafts, to name a few. Such events as Horticultural Shows, Sports Day, Firework Displays, Dances, Staff Dinners and Children's Christmas Parties were a norm every year. A lovely place to grow up in. BUT - houses went with the job so – no job – no house. The tenants of the Bata houses were expected to keep the inside and outside in good order. There was a garden competition every year. Tenants not up to standard were pulled up.

In the early days operators would work so late into the early hours of the morning, i.e. 4 a.m. that they would sleep under a conveyor until 7.30 a.m. ready for work the next day – I know – my Dad Harry Mulcock was one of them. Each member of staff had part of their wages paid into an account. This was used to pay debits which might occur in their department and if a healthy profit was made a withdrawal was issued very month.

One day, as a story goes, the Managing Director found a screw on the ground outside the factory gate and immediately instructed the stock keeper to take a close inventory of his stock to prove that no nuts, bolts, screws etc. were missing in bulk.

# IN JANET'S SHOES

Another incident apparently transpired when the MD asked a man who he was and why he was wandering about the factory grounds. Not getting a quick answer he told him to go to the Staff Department and get his cards. The fact was that the man was there on business and not an employee at all.

My Grandad, Thomas Mulcock, worked as a Gatekeeper and one of his duties was to control that everyone clocked in and out of the factory. One day the MD came by in his car and held his card out of the window saying "Here, clock this". My Grandad replied "My orders are that everyone clocks their own card". He was sacked.

Everyone in the early days was almost afraid to breathe. It was - all heads down - from 7.30a.m. to 5.00 p.m. with 10 minutes break mid-morning, 1 hour for lunch plus 4 minutes mid-afternoon only in the workshops in the Leather and Rubber factories for personal reasons. Apart from our parents' ordeal, us children had a good upbringing in the Bata world with all the facilities as mentioned above.

Everything was clean and pretty with lots of rose gardens outside the Hotel (Community House as it was then known). Also we could wander over the farm fields, surrounding the Estate, to our hearts content. I suppose we got up to mischief; which child doesn't, but if we were seen our parents would know because everyone knew everyone.

Due to years of moving and upheaval, my schoolwork was suffering so I was taken out of school and got a job in a shipping firm in London which I didn't really like. I worked there for about 9 months before leaving and starting a job at Batas in the Calculation Department and then, as I didn't get on with figures much, I was moved to be an invoice typist in the Wholesale department and eventually was made a secretary.

# SHOES IN JANET'S

Among the people I worked for was a man called Peter, who I eventually married in 1958. We had our wedding reception in the Bata hotel ballroom and it was very grand.

The houses were excellent and very sturdy with flat roofs – continental style – very unusual from normal houses of that era. All the gardens were very adequate. As the years passed we saw the Estate grow and prosper. We considered our initial downfall to be the building of 900 houses at Fenlands Park at the rear of the Bata Estate. Things really changed then.

Gradually we lost this and that until in the end there was nothing left except the senior citizens club and bingo. Children's lives altered rapidly – the safe, cosy place they had known was attacked by the big world. We lived on the Bata estate for many years and had two children Trevor in 1960 and Joanne in 1964. Peter worked for Bata's all his life whereas I worked in London from the 1980's until we retired. In the 1990s we moved out to Clacton.

Originally written by Janet Harris (née Mulcock) for her life story.  
Edited and dramatised by Eleanore McCann for Blown Fuse Theatre

---

## IN HER SHOES

IS KINDLY SUPPORTED BY VSDF, THURROCK CVS & THURROCK COUNCIL.

RESEARCH WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY CONTRIBUTION FROM SUSAN YATES, THE THURROCK LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY, BATA HERITAGE CENTRE, TILBURY ON THE THAMES TRUST & THURROCK MUSEUM.

WITH THANKS TO ALL ACTORS WHO CONTRIBUTED THEIR TIME AND VOICES IN ORDER TO BRING THESE STORIES TO LIFE.

CURATION, EDITING AND DRAMATISATION BY BLOWN FUSE ©



**THURROCK  
COUNCIL**