

Vange Memories

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Date Range: 1973-2013

Memories of Vange

I came to Basildon in 1973 aged 21, newly married to Bruce and straight out of teacher training college in Oxfordshire. Bruce was born and brought up in Bristol, and I had grown up in North London in Harrow. We met at college and Bruce had already spent one year of teaching in Brixton before we married in the summer of 73.

At that time the New Towns around London were offering housing with teaching jobs so we both applied for jobs. I was interviewed by Essex and offered a job in Basildon at Northlands School. This suited us beautifully as Bruce's parents had been living in Vange since Bruce's father had been appointed head of a special school in 1969 and moved up from Bristol. Bruce then applied for and got a job at Swan Mead School (now Cherry Tree).

With the job came a flat in Vange just behind St Chad's Church. We were very excited and moved in when we returned from our honeymoon in the August of 1973. We furnished it almost entirely with furniture donated by family and friends. The only things we bought new were a cooker, a washing machine and a table and chairs that cost £20 from the Co-op (if I remember correctly). We also had a small black and white television. We were on the top floor and had a lovely view out over the marshes to the Thames and Kent in the distance. Wharf Lane used to run down from the Barge pub to the railway line. The A13 from Pitsea to the Five Bells roundabout didn't exist. I remember an old man who used to live in an old caravan somewhere along Wharf Lane. He had a lot of dogs.

We had no car. Bruce cycled to school each day and I caught the bus to Pitsea. There were some local shops (next to the Barge pub but for our weekly shop we travelled to Basildon town centre where there was a Tesco behind the post office (where QD now is). I started going to St Chad's church as that is where my parents-in-law went. When we were first here All Saints was still the parish church and services were held there as well as at St Chads. The Sunday school was held in the church hall next to St Chads. The area around us gradually grew up. The old shops went, and the new parade was built.

The old plotland houses that used to be along the main road in old Vange were gradually pulled down to make way for the new houses in Seaview Avenue and The Vale.

We watched the new split level houses being built opposite our flats and thought how nice it would be to have one. It was 1975 and I was expecting our first baby. In December we were offered one of the houses. We moved in at the beginning of January 1976 and 2 days later I went into hospital to have our baby. We had no phone and very little furniture. The roads were not finished and everything was very muddy. I had a second hand coach built pram that was huge but lovely to push and very spacious for loading up the shopping!

Vange Zoo used to be next to Vange School. When the children were small, we used to visit. They had a lion that could be heard to roar from quite a distance! The zoo was shut down after it had been condemned by the Born Free Foundation.

Over the next few years, the area grew up and Ryedene School was built to accommodate the growing population of children. All three of our children attended Ryedene and I taught there myself for a term and for occasional days on supply. We have been in Vange now for 40 years.