

Dear Young People

I thought I would tell you about a memory of my childhood and a journey home from school with a difference.

The other morning when I woke up I could tell immediately that it was foggy. The light coming through the window was different from usual and the sounds outside were muffled. Sure enough when I pulled up the blind and looked out, the world was enveloped in white. It made me remember the foggy days when I was a child over fifty years ago.

In those days nearly all the houses were heated by coal fires so you can imagine the amount of smoke, dirty smoke, that was pouring out of all the chimneys. We know that this helped to create terrible pollution and the smog as it was called. Many winter days we woke up to yellow thick fog creeping everywhere and making it hard to see and breathe.

My home was near a railway station and on these foggy days detonators were placed on the lines just outside the stations, these would go off with a loud bang went the front wheels of the train went over them warning the driver that they were approaching a station and it was time to put on the brakes. So even before I opened my eyes in the morning I knew it was foggy if I heard the detonator going off.

One foggy morning I set off to school. My school was several miles away so to get there I had to take the train and then walk. Off I went with my friends, scarves wrapped across our mouth to try and stop us from breathing in the thick yellow smog. We reached school safely but as the day went on the fog just got thicker and thicker until we could see nothing when we looked out of the window. Imagine how excited we felt when it was announced that because the smog was now so thick the school was closing and we were to go home immediately!

We set off walking to the railway station but to our dismay when we got there we were told that no trains were running because it was too dangerous. There was no choice but to walk all the way home. I still clearly remember that strange and eerie journey, the world had changed completely and nowhere was recognisable. The few cars on the road were moving so slowly that we were walking faster than they were travelling. It was impossible to see any further than your arm's length, it was so quiet because the fog seemed to deaden any sound. Shadows could sometimes be dimly seen only for them to emerge in front of you as people who after a few steps were swallowed up and disappeared. Occasionally we saw a flickering light which was floor level. As we came closer they appeared as oil lamps put at road junctions to warn both traffic and pedestrians. Sometimes a policeman shrouded in fog could be made out trying to direct traffic. The journey was like something I had never experienced before.

Eventually I arrived at my house and as my mum opened the door and I stepped in it was as if I was stepping from an enchanted and slightly sinister world into the safe, familiar comfort of my home.

We no longer have the terrible smog in England, people understand the importance of clean air; but the next time you wake up on a foggy morning stop and think how it changes the sights and sounds of our world.

Keep safe

Patricia