

Dearest Luke

Sleepovers have been part of our family-fun since your oldest brother could stay put in a bed. As the youngest of the three, you were always ready to join in clutching a pacifier and a blue “geesh.”\*

Poppy has many photos of three boys snuggled like puppies in a basket!

I never had sleepovers with my grandparents. They lived far away and were not babysitters, they were GUESTS! On their visits, the kids went to the base nursery (like daycare) and the adults sipped fancy cocktails before going out for dinner.

When we lived in England, however, my grandmothers visited and my parents decided to leave us with the housekeeper for a few days. We stayed in Mrs. Gs cottage, a little two-bedroom house on Fulbeck Manor near the airbase. She could not stay at our house because her husband, Jerry, suffered from Shell Shock, like PTSD, too frightened to sleep anywhere but his own bed.

Mom explained that Shell Shock was a disease we could not see; we must be very kind to Jerry and always mind our manners. I was 9, Pam 7, Terry, 5, and Debby 4. “It would be an adventure,” my dad grinned! “especially since the cottage doesn’t have a bathroom! You get to use an outhouse! Just like when I lived at the lake!”

As he unpacked the car Dad, gave his usual instructions, “Nancy’s in charge! Don’t fight and don’t smoke.” Watching him, I began to feel nervous and abandoned – we’d never been left for this long! But, nobody cried. We were brave! We were Jacksons. “When the going gets tough, the tough get going!” he reminded. As he drove away, I gathered my courage and my siblings and marched into the little cottage with the crazy man and no bathroom!

The four of us explored the cottage and decided it looked like a gingerbread house: colorful, clean and cute. “What about the loo.” Terry said, and Mrs G. led us through the back door down three stone steps to an

unpainted, wooden shed. Opening the creaky door, Mrs. G. pointed to a wide seat with two large empty circles covering a stinking pit. Mrs. G. warned, "Always call me if you need to use the loo. I'll hang on so you won't fall in otherwise I'll never find ya!" What an adventure, I thought!

We saw Jerry at teatime. He looked normal -- tall, bearded -- but with vacant eyes and no smile. Sitting together at the little table, we ate quietly, munching our scones with jam, remembering to mind our manners.

At bedtime, we brushed our teeth at the kitchen sink and Mrs. G. led us up a narrow stairway and explained, "My room is to the left and your room is to the right. Just yell, if there's trouble -- but not too loud as to wake Jerry!"

Our room had a twin bed. She said, "Sleep side-by-side, heads toward the wall and feet into the room. There's a "chamber pot" under the bed for emergencies. Good night, wee ones." And she closed the door.

Scared, we helped each other get ready for bed. Not only were we away from home, but we had to sleep in one bed, like sardines in a can! Curious, I pulled out the chamber pot -- it was painted with flowers and had a handle. We knew about chamber pots, but we called them coffee cans. "It's for emergencies!" I reminded. Jumping into bed, we said our prayers and snuggled in. We were cozy and together, safe and warm, and brave.

Until Debby had to go potty. She woke me, I woke Pam, and Pam woke Terry. Everyone watched me jump onto the cold floor and reach for the chamber pot. An emergency!

Wide awake now, trying not to giggle, we watched Debby lower her little butt onto the pot. We tried to be quiet, afraid of waking Jerry.

No tissue, so Debby wiggled dry and jumped back onto the bed. Now we all wanted to try. Easy, just like hovering over a coffee can while speeding down a bumpy road, which we had mastered many times. I pushed the pot under the bed and squeezed into my assigned spot.

The next morning, Mrs. G. opened the bedroom door greeting us with a smile and a cheery, "Did you little ones sleep well?" We nodded politely and watched her pull out the pot. "Blimey!" she said, "The pot is full up! I'll have to bring two pots tomorrow night!"

Time passed quickly at the little cottage. If we needed to go to the bathroom, we called Mrs. G., otherwise we roamed through gardens, climbed over fences and splashed in puddles. We rarely saw Jerry so forgot to be afraid

Our parents returned with hugs, kisses, and souvenirs. We all talked at once as Mrs. G. piled our belongings into the station wagon. Arms waving goodbye from all four windows, Dad drove back to the base whistling his favorite Air Force tunes.

And so, dearest Luke, that is the story of my first sleepover. May all your adventures include happy days, warm beds and indoor plumbing. Love your forever, Granz.

\*geish – a baby blanket

By Nancy Kowalski