



### **About the Author**

Valerie McLean is a trained nurse, experienced in the care of the elderly. She also teaches Arts and Crafts, and has worked for the past twelve years on reminiscence and other community arts projects with older people in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, initiated by Artshape Gloucestershire, Artspace Cinderford and the Royal Forest of Dean College. Her previous book 'Only Old Once: Introducing Creativity into Elderly Care' was published in 1997

### **Introducing this book**

This book is intended to be used by anyone who is developing a reminiscence programme for groups of older people, although there is also scope for one to one situations. The subject matter, which has been divided into topics, was selected for inclusion because of its popularity with the groups with whom I have worked over the past twelve years. This is essentially a practical manual, and the photographs and other images can be enlarged or copied using a laser copier. The copies can then be viewed by the group whilst the group leader reads out the memories and cue questions. I have found that this activity naturally triggers reminiscence.

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## School Days

*“We’ll talk of sunshine and of song  
And Summer days when we were young:  
Sweet childish days, that were as long  
As twenty days are now”* Wordsworth 1802

Memories of school days are usually a mixture of happy and sad times and although school life could be very hard at a time when teachers were very strict and all children were expected to conform, almost everyone has a story to tell. I find that topics covering, School Days and Childhood will often last over many sessions. The photographs on pages 24 and 29 can be copied and passed around.

These memories from Winnie, who grew up in the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire, can be read out to the group, in order to stimulate further memories and start the stories flowing.

*“My school days were really happy. The photograph at the top of page 24 is of my class and I am second from the left at the front, with my arms folded. The little girl with the frilly collar holding the slate was the headmasters daughter and the teachers pet.*

*When the bell went, the school day began and we filed into the hall for assembly, with prayers and hymns like; All Things Bright and Beautiful’ and ‘Jesus wants me for a Sunbeam’*

*We had to behave ourselves and the boys used to get the cane when they were naughty. I can remember how the boys used to pick the primroses and other flowers, bundle them up and sell them. The boys spent a lot of time playing marbles. I can remember a girl called Betty Partridge who won all the marbles from the boys and wore her thumb nail right down!*

*I didn’t like arithmetic, but I was always very good at composition. We usually used a slate to write on. Sometimes we did exercises in the open air. For a change we were given needles and pink wool and we would knit vests.*

*Every so often, the Welfare Officer came around to the school to see who needed extra help with clothes. So, on that day, the children would come in their scruffiest outfits.*

*For lunch I sometimes took bread and home-cured lard, or bread and jam. Occasionally, I had faggots and peas from the corner shop, for one penny.*

*We had such fun! We often tried to catch a rabbit for rabbit stew. The cat that used to roam around the school yard was very good at catching rabbits. The cat would not let anyone but my mother take the rabbit from her, so my mother often used to make us a stew!*

*I can remember so well, how we used to look at Littledean Church clock from the classroom.”*

## Cue Questions - one or two may be sufficient to start the memories flowing

- 1 Can you remember your school days?
- 2 How far did you have to walk to get there?
- 3 Did you enjoy school? What was the building like ?
- 4 What was the morning assembly like? Can you remember any of the hymns and songs? Shall we try and sing one or two to refresh our minds?  
  
Do you remember the words to `All things bright and beautiful?  
(encourage the group to sing)
- 5 What can you remember about the teachers ? Were they strict ?
- 6 Can anyone remember who they played with in the playground?
- 7 Does anyone still have a school photograph to show us ?
- 8 What happened at lunchtime? Can anyone remember having Rabbit Stew?  
What other dishes might you have had for your main meal and tea time meal ?
- 9 What was your school room like?
- 10 Can you remember your first day at school ?
- 11 What did you wear for school ?
- 12 What did you play in the playground ?
- 13 What did you keep in your desk ?

