

Stories for Lipreading



MARMALADE SANDWICHES by Michael Edwards.

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]
Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this short, autobiographical piece, which is called 'Marmalade Sandwiches' by Michael Edwards.

Marmalade Sandwiches by Michael Edwards.

In those long, hot, school summer holidays in the early 1950s, my brother and I were often asked by our father to help with tasks in the boiler house at the convent laundry, where he was the resident engineer. Extra pairs of hands were always useful, and it kept us out of inevitable mischief.

I remember well the oppressively hot boiler-house, and the arduous task of filling the bunker with barrow-load after heavy barrow-load of coal, fetched from a large outside fuel store. This was hot, back-breaking work for a couple of young boys, relieved only by a short break for refreshments, which we should have looked forward to eagerly.

The laundry sister would quietly bring in a billycan of tea, three chipped enamel mugs, and a plate of sandwiches. She would leave them on the bunker wall for when Dad decided we were sufficiently exhausted to deserve refreshment. A few words with Dad, a smile in our direction, and she would depart as quietly as she had arrived.

The tea was always reasonably warm, ready milked, and seriously sweet. The billycan lid kept the coal dust out. The sandwiches were prepared with the thinnest slices of white bread, cut into large triangles. They would be filled with grated cheese or smeared with cheap margarine and generously spread with runny home-made marmalade.

Left in the stifling heat on the bunker wall, the thin-sliced white bread sandwiches would soon be liberally coated with coal dust and begin to curl up from the corners, as we went about our task. The cheese sandwiches remained surprisingly palatable to us exhausted workers, despite the sweaty cheese and the dried-out bread. The tea was very welcome. The marmalade sandwiches were altogether a different matter.

Now, marmalade does not react well to hot, dry, conditions. Soaking into the already curled-up bread, the runny marmalade congealed into a sharply sweet lacquer, coated with gritty coal-dust. It seemed that just as we stopped for our break, the laundry sister would contrive to pop her head round the boiler-house door, to check that we were enjoying our refreshments. Chatting with the sister, Dad somehow managed to avoid eating the sandwiches, but my brother and I were duty-bound to tuck in appreciatively, under the expectant gaze of the laundry sister. I would down the dreadful sandwiches, hating every awful mouthful. To this day, the sight of a jar of marmalade

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brings back those sweltering days in the boiler-house, and the bitter-sweet aftertaste of dried up marmalade and tightly curled sandwiches.

My brother ate the offerings with relish, much to the sister's satisfaction and to my incomprehension, and enjoys marmalade to this day.