



Valerie's Story (Individual stories from WISH YOU WERE HERE!, Book 3)

Lynn Russell, Neil Hanson

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One of seven touching true stories from Wish You Were Here!, the tale of Butlin's holiday camps.

'When I got to the camp I felt as if I'd suddenly walked into Utopia – it was so colourful, so warm, so friendly. There were lights across the roads, there were banners fluttering in the breeze... There seemed to be laughter coming from every building.'

With grey post-WWII skies hanging low over Britain, factories lining the streets and smoke stacks dotting the horizon, there was one way that ordinary families could escape: the ever-cheerful holiday camps of Butlin's.

When Billy Butlin founded his holiday camps in 1936, they were bastions of community spirit and havens of luxury. Here, for one week, wives and mothers were freed from the toil and drudgery of housework, children ran free through the grounds, fathers and husbands hung up their work clothes. Ever-helpful redcoats were on hand all hours of the day, dinner halls ready with plentiful food for old and young alike, bars stocked to quench any level of thirst, ballrooms waiting to be flooded with shiny shoes, rustling dresses and peals of laughter. And, as the sun went down on another exhausting, happy day, a chorus line was ready to sing holidaymakers back to their beds.

Rich in period detail and highly evocative, Wish You Were Here! follows the lives of seven of the camps' key figures through the highs and lows of the holiday season: from redcoats searching for stardom to young families who returned year after year, to pensioners who rediscovered an inner youth.

The laughter and tears, the loves and losses, and the fun and friendships that have lasted a lifetime – it's all here.

Funny, moving and heartwarming, they are tales of swimming pools and sing-a-longs, Glamorous Grannies and bicycle rides, and of a community spirit that burned brightly in a much-loved British institution.

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