

Memories of the 27th

I would be about 10 years old (approx. 1957) when I joined the 27th – my friends from our street went on a Tuesday, but because that night was full, it would have to be a Thursday for me, I had no choice. It forced me to look at everything afresh – certainly for new friends, and I met Arkela – who quite simply was the most impressive woman I had ever met!



Yes, I had my Mum, my Aunt Gwen and my Nan, but I had known them all my life and suppose I took them for granted. There were teachers, but they could be fickle – dispensing praise and punishment with equal abandon.

But Arkela – she was awesome. Not only did she make you feel special by having time for everyone, she had a name that suggested Greek mythology, and as such, capable of both wonderful and terrifying deeds. Her words were law – you took for gospel all she said.

If she asked you to do something, you would do it – no questions needed. She liked to set tasks, I remember two of them.

The first was to find a ginger hair at least 6 inches long. You can imagine the bemusement as we went from door to door asking if anybody had ginger hair and could we have a strand!

The second task was to bring in a gold sovereign. I knew that my Gran had one. Unlike my Nan whom I saw almost daily, my Dad's Mum was almost a stranger, lived in a dark house, and was a bit scary. But, because Arkela had "decreed" that a gold sovereign was needed, I ran the 2 miles to Gran's house and had no hesitation

or fear in making the request to borrow it. Gran lent it willingly – and you can imagine how proud I felt at being the first to accomplish that task!

Looking back, I suspect that if Arkela had been a passionate, practising Jesuit then I and our pack would have willingly followed her in the saving of souls and destruction of the wicked – well in Chaddesdon certainly, maybe as far as the Cemetery (I don't think Mum would have allowed us beyond there).

She did not appear to want to change the world like that – I like to think she saw her task as bringing gaiety and adventure to her Cubs, and had that ability to balance the noise and chaos of group games with thought and encouragement to achieve individual tasks.

She made Cubs fun.

Tony Bannister

