

Disabilities and the Chalet School

Mark Taha “Anna has my sympathies for what they're worth. As an avid reader, I can hardly imagine not being able to read small print. I also see Jessica's point of view, have written her not capitulating but instead responding to Mary Lou's harangue. ‘So that's why you wanted me to be your partner? To lecture me? Well, I know I wouldn't like to be like Rosamund but at least she's got a home! First they made me a weekly boarder because the house was ten miles away. Then they send me to Devon then Switzerland! You see, Mary Lou, I hate boarding schools and people who send their kids to them! Was this your idea or did somebody put you up to it?’ Perhaps I should add this to Chalet School fan fiction! Have vision of Jessica doing the unthinkable and telling Joey where she got off.”



Reg Part 1

Judi Marsh “I am so glad that Annette Mackay is writing Reg's account of his romance with Len. What a heartbreaking tale it is though. Beautifully illustrated.”

Jam Making

Hilary Hartley “Having a glut of apples this year I have been busy making jam or, more accurately, jelly flavoured with lemon, ginger, or blackberry. I have been reminded how much jam matron has been contributing to the sales of work each year, where did she get all the jars? There is also Janie (of La Rochelle) making raspberry jam with the four northern saints picking raspberries for her. The number of accidents that occur when jam making and the treatment offered makes me thankful that I live in the present – not Chalet time.”

Newspaper Reviews

Mark Taha “Sarah Carson, page 9 in the *I Paper* – ‘I grew up reading Elinor Brent-Dyer's Chalet School books.’”

Bandages and Bunting

Judi Marsh “Another well-written short story but a cheering tale. It's good to discover Matey in an unusually upbeat but believable mood.”

Mark Taha “Was this set in the Welsh brain of the CS or hadn't they gone to Switzerland by then?”

Alixé nudged her in the ribs and laid a gentle hand on Joyce Linton's arm. "Maybe we will have to think of each other being brave, wherever we are, if war comes. It will give us the feeling of being together, no matter where we are living, or what school we are at."

"And that in itself, will give the rest of us courage, I think," Kitty volunteered in an attempt to make up for her previous comment, her rosy cheeks burning at the outpouring of feeling that was unusual for her. She was a heedless young person, but the recalling of her friends to the lands now occupied by the Reich had changed her demeanour; she was becoming more inclined to think about others, especially now her own little world was becoming affected by the actions of ambitious and immoral world leaders.

"How is Joanna feeling, Em?" she asked, referring to Emmie Linders' sister, the younger by two years.

Emmie shrugged and regarded the other three of the quartet in turn, struggling to hold back impending tears.

"Much as you can imagine," she mumbled, and accepted gratefully the supportive hand of Alixé von Elsen in hers. "She doesn't want to go, and she doesn't understand why, either. Nor do I for that matter. I mean – I know it is because our parents have been instructed to enrol us in German schools, but I do not see why it should matter if we stayed here in the Tyrol. What harm are we doing? We are but children, of no threat to them, with no influence. What can they possibly gain from moving us?"

Kitty, Alixé and Joyce shrugged, sighing at her question, and the latter gave Emmie a rub on her back as demonstrative support. There followed moments of reticence as the four processed each other's feelings and their own thoughts on the subject, until Alixé clasped her hands with the arrival of what Kitty declared as 'a topping idea', thus inviting the wrath of the prefects should they have overheard her using forbidden slang.

"Let's meet up, the four of us, when all this is over, somewhere safe, however old we are, whether we are still at school or even..." she wrinkled her nose in horror at the very idea, "...adults. Just like it says in the Peace League!"

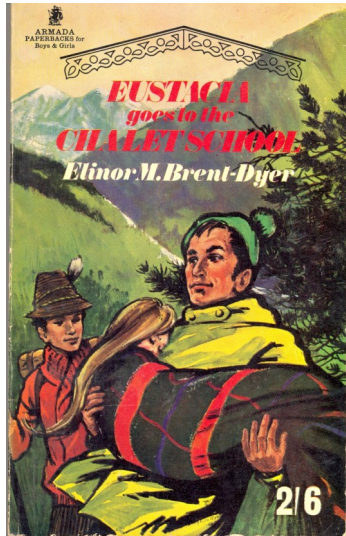
The four hugged at the inspired suggestion, none of them realising quite how long it would be until the reunion would take place.

"It is fortuitous," Emmie would say later, "that none of us could see into the future."

They then controlled themselves as petite, dark Maria Marani indicated their turn to approach the Head Girl at the far side of the room.

They made a solemn line as they signed their names with the dignity the occasion deserved. Many a time all the schoolgirls in Hall would remember this moment; those who would suffer in the coming years, those never to return, those carrying on as best they could, awaiting news of family and friends as





This, we are told, severely damages her muscles. Dr Jem tells Stacie that she will have to be patient and not ‘fret and grumble and upset your nerves by crying’ as doing that could hamper her progress. As the reader we have to ask ourselves – was Dr Jem correct? Could worrying affect Stacie’s physical recovery? And was it a fair thing to ask of a child recovering from a life-changing injury? The answer to the first question is complicated. Compared to 1929 (when *Eustacia* was published) doctors now have a deeper understanding of mental health, and specifically how it relates to physical health. The two things are undoubtedly deeply connected. Poor physical health may lead to poor mental health and vice versa. So, in one sense Dr Jem is right. Stacie being anxious or depressed could indeed affect her recovery. However – it is also now known that

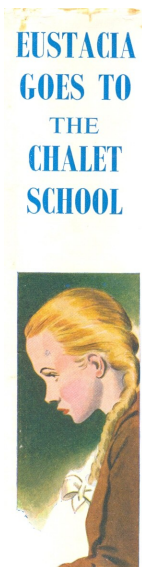
suppressing emotions is unhealthy and can lead to greater problems (both mental and physical). So while Jem was correct in telling Stacie about the connection between the body and the mind, simply instructing her not to feel the (very reasonable) emotions of grief or anger or frustration he may have been doing more harm than good.

Another question we may ask is: is Elinor M. Brent-Dyers portrayal of Stacie’s recovery realistic? Would a fourteen year old girl really have such constant patience and courage? This is an even more complex question.

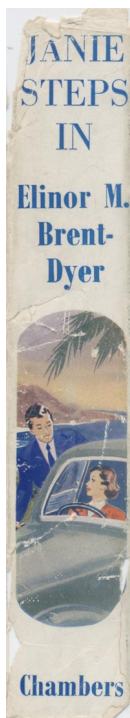
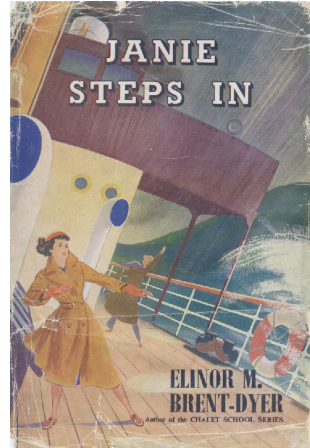
People are all different. It is almost impossible to predict how any person will react to a given situation, especially something as unpredictable as an injury like Stacie’s. And the same person might be in a similar situation twice and react entirely differently.

I found that out for myself recently. When I was diagnosed as visually impaired (at exactly Stacie’s age) I was relatively calm. I think Jem would have been proud of my reaction! Obviously I wasn’t thrilled – but I got on with things. I didn’t do much crying, grumbling or fretting. I threw myself into mobility lessons, learning how to use a white cane in record time. I subscribed to Audible so I could listen to books when my eyes were too tired to read. I brought a pair of talking scales for cooking.

However, I am currently going through the process of being diagnosed with a version of autoimmune arthritis and this time I am finding it a lot harder to remain calm and stoical. I am tired of doctors, hospitals and tests, and there is quite a lot of crying and/or shouting involved, as well as looking for loopholes (my hip doesn’t hurt... ok, it’s a bit sore but I just sat on a hard chair for too long...it must be a sprain...or a fracture...etc, etc).



grandmothers, “Giovanna Anne and Peronelle Jane”. “For everyday use they will be Vanna and Nella.” This was a revelation to me as I always thought Nella was short for Antonella. Francesca Atherton has “baby Anita” who is the Chalet School’s Nita Eltringham. Towards the end of *Janie of La Rochelle* Janie’s first daughter arrives, “Juliet Pauline” the Julie Lucy of peritonitis fame in *Bride Leads the Chalet School*. *Janie Steps In* was published in 1953 - the same year as *Bride Leads the Chalet School*, so the Lucy clan must have been on EBD’s mind. Janie now has a growing family, Julie is six, John is five, Betsy is two years old and the baby, Vi, is “just eighteen weeks”, her birthday is April 7th (the day after EBD’s). Julie Lucy’s peritonitis is foreshadowed in an illness caused by a midnight feast in chapter four. Julie and John helped themselves to “jam tarts, green apples, sandwich, cake, piccalilli and sardines with a tin of condensed milk” (I’m not surprised!). “Dr Peter was really afraid that Julie was in for appendicitis, she was in such agonies of pain.”



In *Janie Steps In*, we also meet “Nan Blakeney-Anita Gertrude if you want the whole of it,” from Blakeney Place in Ireland. Anne and Peter Chester have a large brood by now, Beth, Paul, Nancy, twins, Robin and Dickon and Barbara. Barbara Chester is presented as a very weak, sickly child, “waxen, hollows in the little cheeks, arms and legs mere sticks”, who was not expected to live more than an hour. It is “unlikely that she’ll ever be anything but feeble and sickly all her life.” The eldest girl, Beth Chester, is jealous of the attention that mother Anne gives to Barbara and feels that. “Babs has taken her place.” Janie tells Anne, “You’ve got to think of Beth as well as Babs.” In the final chapter, Anne, Beth and Barbara are in Switzerland and we hear that “Babs was steadily if slowly improving, there seemed a possibility that by the time she was into her teens, she would be able to lead a normal life,” thus paving the way for the following book, *The Chalet School and Barbara* (1954).

More babies arrive, Rosamund has a daughter, “Juliana Jane” whom we will encounter in the Chalet School as “Judy Willoughby”. Janie has a son, “Barnabas Julian” – “son of consolation”. The meaning of names was an EBD interest. In the final chapter we hear “news of a very good new school opening in the autumn, not far from Jerbourg”, so the girls are destined for the Chalet School.

The “Two Janies” are my favourite La Rochelle books for the domestic and holiday scenes and the back story they give for several Chalet School characters.