

# Family given 3-week US trip



**HERE WE GO:** Getting ready for their holiday trip as guests of a former US serviceman are Ron and Gaye Bowers and their son Chris, 16

A SCHOOL caretaker and his family are to have the holiday of a lifetime thanks to an American pensioner.

Lauren Elkin never forgot the four-year-old boy he nicknamed Cottontop, and for whom he provided treats during the Second World War.

Mr Elkin, now 71, has invited Ron Bowers, now 52, and his family from Woodbridge to America for three weeks this summer, on an all-expenses paid holiday in order to renew the friendship.

Mr Bowers, caretaker of the Abbey School, recalled yesterday how, as a child, he had been spoilt by Mr Elkin, a mess sergeant with the 493rd bomb group stationed at Debach airfield.

"My dad Cecil used to be a stoker at the airfield," said Mr Bowers, "and he took me over there while he was at work and I was left in the cookhouse. I was spoilt and I used to get lots of peaches and cream, and was taken to the cinema."

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**By RICHARD SMITH**

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The friendship lapsed at the close of the war, and it was not until 47 years later that the two met again.

Mr Bowers said he had attended a reunion at Ramsholt, near Woodbridge, as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Americans coming to Suffolk, and this had put him in touch with Mr Elkin, now living in San Francisco.

He then received a letter from Mr Elkin saying: "I cannot begin to tell you how happy I was with the picture and your letter. It triggered a lot of old memories for me."

They were eventually reunited in Woodbridge in September, when Mr Elkin and his wife Jean came over for a wedding in Suffolk and Mr Elkin invited Mr Bowers, his wife Gaye and son Christopher for a holiday.