

Memories of a Childhood - Jane McQueen-Mason

I have just been reading the PRS book that arrived here yesterday. I am flooded by memories and questions.

Strangely, I have no memory of egg throwing on the train. It is hard for me to imagine that I did not participate. I only remember one train journey back to school.

I clearly remember how miserable I was my first term. Crying myself to sleep each night with my teddy bear, to the taunts of my cold hearted room mates. At some point there was the realization that you were either going to be a crybaby for the next five years or survive; so you change become a braver person. No longer a child, but a young adult with new friends and influences. That independence that then saw me through travelling and living on beaches; moving to America, starting a business

Swimming. I used to love going swimming, taking the bus to the town pool in the middle of winter; the pool was always so warm and it was a chance to be among people other than school people. Even if we didn't talk to them, we were out and about and human. Also the summer outdoor pool that we went too each afternoon after school in summer term; singing to and from on the bus. Lots of flirting.

Deich walks with Miss Mohan in old Rodney. I remember coming back and our legs, bare from below the knees to the hem of our skirts - Not much protection from those Arctic winds - were blue with cold. I remember one deich walk in particular as being particularly grueling and hard. This winter in NY is probably similar and I put on many layers before going out; I shudder to think of the deich walk in very little clothing.

Always being in trouble with Miss Jenkins in Drake. The term we spent in the attic flat. We seemed to go from one problem to the next with reckless abandon. Someone leaving their socks to soak in the bathroom, with taps running. Something about Miss knights stereo! Couple of girls being so drunk on the last day of term that they threw up over our coats, which we had to wear on the train ride home. Reeking of vomit and cheap alcohol.

Not being caught, but someone splitting on us for having boys in our room in the middle of the night. Making coffee with immersion heaters and smoking during these visits. No-one knew until the following term. Simon, my brother telling me, after I told him why Mum and Dad were unexpectedly visiting that weekend; So and so, said when the announcement was made in assembly, bet its your sister; Simon loyally responding No Jane's not like that.

How quiet the school was, when everyone was watching the movie. Vicki Reilly and I being on the netball courts, dancing in rain puddles after a shower, and no-one being around. Everyone had chosen to see the film, but us.

I am staggered by the reminiscences of the food. I remember it for the most part as disgusting. Although now I have a catering company I am impressed that the menu was as wide as it was and we all for the most part ate well. Certainly no sign of obesity. Simon my brother who had been quite tubby had to have all new clothes after one term as he had lost so much weight.

Teacher who left the biggest impression. Miss Robertson. I still remember some of her classes. In particular a class she gave after she had been to the States or after Martin Luther King was shot about being black and riding at the back of the bus. Miss Robertson was rightly outraged by it all. Also reciting "slowly silently, now the moon, walks the night in her silver shoon."

Interesting that Mr. Dyer and Mr. Carter wrote their memories. Those are the two male teachers I remember very clearly. Loved Mr. Carters science class; I clearly remember the diagrams in the Science book about osmosis. Mr. Dyer who always seemed so cool; amazingly taught us drama. The school plays and performances. Oliver being such a great musical.

How few of the pupils who were there at the same time as myself wrote their memories. Although I suspect the same people always write. Is it that we don't care? I don't think that's the case. I know, I for one didn't join to be in contact with anyone. I more wanted to know what happened to everyone. Did we survive? Go on to great things? Join the forces because it was what we knew?

I wonder about the girls that always wet their beds? Who tossed themselves to sleep each night? Who had nightmares? Who like most of us were really quietly ordinary and made no waves, left no memories. I get the newsletter and a name will jump out and a face slowly emerge, someone I hadn't thought about in 35 years. Phew you made it. I once wrote to Carol Goronwy that for me one of the shocking things in the newsletter is how many people in our age group have passed away. It seems like a large number, maybe I am wrong.

Making ice drinks between the two windows of our bedrooms in the winter.

I was and am untidy, no winning of house points with me in your room making bad beds.

The British Navy submarines coming in and watching the female teachers coming back from a cocktail party on board. We sat on our beds and watched the teachers walking back through mainsite all a little tipsy in their evening gowns Climbing up and down the ladders of the submarines with the ratings standing below looking up our rolled up skirts.

A war time submarine being pulled out of the ??? as we watched from Miss Veseys art class.

Telling ghost stories, playing murders and having seances. A lot.

Being in sick bay with German measles. Listening to Eric Burden and The Animals singing 'Please don't let me be misunderstood' in the recovery rooms.

I actually have many music memories associated with PRS and different people. Its where my love for the Blues comes from.

Someone dropping a frog down the front of my dress on deich walk.

Cross country running.

My most fearful memory. The names being called out for vaccinations. I was and am fearful of needles. Going to bed the night before terrified of the coming mornings inoculation.

The sadistic dentist.

Snow ball fights on the playing fields.

Singing Christmas carols each Sunday of advent on the stairs with candles. Our St. Nicholas candy in our shoes on December 6th.

How incredible the rotisserie chicken and chips and the cake shop were on parents visits.

DS being such a blessing as we ate one good thing a week. I have occasionally used MS. Miskins information: when I have been asked to talk to groups about food and catering. Particularly a class about home-made soup, versus canned and packet soups. It was a good example of short cut cooking.

The term we all thought Je Taime moi non amour was the HOT record.

Being given an essay to write 500 words on Walls. I wrote 250 on walls in rooms and 250 words on Walls Ice

Cream. I just thought I was so clever! Apparently still do.

The bright package of ST's I bought to school my first term, and then every term until I left, but the package greyer and dingier with each term.

Reading the daily news on the school board and it all seeming so far away. I now realize that there was a lot going on. Paris Students riots, Tet offensive etc etc

School dances. All those crushes running rampant. Everyone in everyone else's clothes. Dancing, hoping for a kiss, when we were first years; then hoping for the kiss from the right person the following years. In my case rarely achieved.

Rounding up lent out clothing at the end of term, to take home and maybe even wear myself.

I think about really how incredible PRS was. Teenage children from all walks of life and experiences, thrown together and making it work for the most part joyfully.

Jane McQueen-Mason