

Back in the day by Sarah Webb

There comes a time in all our lives when we all reflect on our past – the good, the bad and the ugly...

With my daughter having recently departed for university, the death of a cherished and beloved family member and having retired I have certainly been involved in this process! This has made me think about what I've done (so far) and what I can give back...

When I first began Waddesdon Church of England Secondary School in 1979, it was with a fair amount of trepidation and anxiety. I was one of three children who came from beyond the traditional catchment area of the school. Our parents took it in turn every day to take and pick us up! This was a massive commitment and one that I will be forever grateful that they undertook. There were no buses or minibus routes between Haddenham and the school.

I was placed in 2W. This was with Miss Webb. I found Miss Webb to be kind, understanding and nurturing, the perfect teacher for me. I was new to the school, and the area, and apart from my car share buddies knew no one. I felt alone and bewildered...



Class 2W (1979)

After the initial settling in period, I remember a real lightbulb moment in Mr Evan's English lesson. I wrote a story about an armadillo set in South America and the feedback I received about it was extremely positive. Don't ask me where I got the idea from but from that moment onwards my confidence seemed to snowball in all areas of school life. In writing that story something clicked and I was firmly immersed in life at Waddesdon – it ignited my thirst for learning and more! I particularly loved, and enjoyed, English, History and PE although that's not to say I didn't enjoy learning in other areas.

In English I remember lessons based on 'Cider with Rosie', 'Under Milk Wood' - made all the better as Mr Evans read sections aloud with his melodious Welsh accent that captivated you. I will always remember the moment he shared with us what the village Llareggub meant, spelt backwards! We were so shocked and scandalised! Also, 'The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 and three quarters' by Sue Townsend. I just couldn't stop laughing and read every book, cover to cover! This also triggered a memorable family outing to The Wyndham Theatre in London to see the play based on the books. Those lessons enhanced a lifelong love of books, reading, writing and the performing arts! This has stayed with me throughout my personal and professional life. The works of Dylan Thomas I particularly treasure!

History, I absolutely loved and was fortunate enough to be taught by Mrs Johnston and Mr Parker. Again, those lessons have stayed with me throughout my life. I was totally absorbed in the various topics we covered. History was the focus of my first degree at university and has always been a favourite subject to teach and investigate.

PE, I loved. It was a welcome release from the hard work of the academic subjects. I was part of the hockey, netball and tennis teams for the school. This involved after school matches to many schools in the local area which meant extended school days. Often, I didn't get home until 6pm and then didn't complete homework until late at night. It wasn't until I was a young teacher, teaching PE to Years 6, 7 and 8 that I realised the work and commitment involved in this role. Miss Cadge and Mr Goodwin were dedicated and devoted to their roles and us. I remember one particular match where I acquired a number of significant bruises playing 'Goal Keeper' in netball. Also, playing hockey against the boys where a rather unfortunate incident happened accidentally and then happened again in the next lesson! I was mortified but this meant I was able to roam around the hockey pitch without being tackled by anyone! I also remember taking part in the annual cross-country races through the school grounds and Waddesdon Estate – I did actually run the races; there were other individuals (who shall remain nameless) who took short cuts and rested! I still have my treasured tennis medal won with Alison Richards.

Maths was one of the subjects that I did not have a natural affinity. Mr Norman was such a patient and inspiring teacher. He relentlessly, and methodically, went through areas that I didn't understand. His teaching methods were vast but they worked! Also, being part of the Young Enterprise company. I was fortunate enough to be part of Mr Norman's form group in fourth and fifth form and I will always remember one particularly memorable assembly that myself and several others performed.

I enjoyed science lessons with Mrs Cook and Mr Neville. Home Economics lessons with Mrs Price have always come in handy. It is due to these that I can actually make pastry and many other things! Also, know various terms when they're used by Mary Berry and other chefs. I always remember the Christmas Carol concert based at the church where there was simultaneously a homemade sweet and Christmas cake competition. I can remember winning a prize for my homemade sweets and my sister winning a prize for her Christmas cake! The church service at Christmas was significant with the whole school attending. There were other points in the school year when we went to church.

Art lessons with Miss Bushnell were exciting and again gave a welcome break from the academic subjects. I always remember screen printing a piece of fabric with a black cat design. I treasured this for a number of years. Miss Shell was an incredibly talented music teacher and musician. There were various performance both in and out of school in various arenas. I remember taking music as an additional subject, and covering the syllabus within a year.

There were many, many school trips. One that stands out in my mind is the trip to France. We visited many places including the Louvre, Sacre Coeur, Montmartre, took a ride on a Bateaux Mouche and visited a chocolate factory. During the trip we had to unexpectedly change hotels and there was a long-delayed journey home. I am very appreciative of Mrs Pacitti's efforts to teach us French and this has always come in handy. Other trips I remember are linked to the 'Duke of Edinburgh' award scheme. These trips were amazing and taught us many important and transferable life skills. For example, resilience, determination and teamwork. A good sense of humour was vital at all times and in all situations!

In my final year I was fortunate enough to be made a prefect. As a prefect there were many privileges. This included having break times in Mrs Price's room. Also, a memorable trip to Oxford via mini bus driven by Mr Neville. In my final year, it was very noticeable that the school had physically grown. There was now a bus transporting pupils to Aylesbury and further afield. The school also had its own minibuses thanks to the efforts of a very active PTA.

There were many school discos. One I recollect being held in the village hall, dancing to music by Human League, Madness, Michael Jackson and The Moody Blues.

During our time there were also teacher strikes. I can remember going home with friends who lived in the village for lunch as our teachers were on strike which meant we had to be off site at lunchtime.

Some of you may think these are sentimental ramblings and query why am I bothering to record these... In my professional career I was a teacher/deputy headteacher of a large primary school. One thing that you are often asked about as a teacher, during courses, is to reflect on your school days and your own school teacher experiences. I have often been shocked by the number of colleagues who have shared how they hated their school days. This was never the case for me. I enjoyed every single minute and that I put down to the Waddesdon experience – the teachers and senior leadership. I think that I was extremely fortunate to attend a school that provided a vast array of learning opportunities that appealed, and developed, the whole person. Whatever interested you, there was something to motivate you! These teachers and senior leaders – Mr Christopher and Mr Evans. They made my school days memorable and enjoyable within a safe, caring and compassionate environment. They instilled positivity and a growth mindset – an attitude that anything is possible and the confidence to pursue your dreams.

At 16, we had to go elsewhere for our education. There was no sixth form centre or scope for sixth form provision. This meant a **huge** change and it was an **enormous** wrench to leave an environment where I felt so comfortable and established. This was at a key point in my education. I was lucky that I went onto university to achieve my first degree. This then led to me becoming a teacher in a large middle school. I then progressed to become a senior leader and achieved my Masters degree in Education and also NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship). I was a local authority moderator for a number of years and undertook various other roles. For example, mentoring student teachers from various universities.

The plans, and reality, of the new sixth form centre very much resonates with me because of the experience outlined above and this is why I feel this is a significant and very important project to support. Additionally, the development and establishment of an alumni group, sharing our experiences for present and future generations. It is clear from reading the various accounts on the Facebook Friends of Waddesdon School page that there are a lot of past pupils who feel very fondly about their school days.

Very, very recently a news article of my/our exams award ceremony in 1983 has come to light. Thank you, Andrew Rolt.

At our leaving ceremony there were various guests of honour including George Walden, MP for Buckingham, and David Kissinger, son of the US politician, Henry Kissinger. Many of the words in Mr Christopher's speech are important and summarise my memories. He noted that in 1983 the school had reached its full capacity, stating that the development of activities and teaching was more important than the physical growth of the school.

All aspects of the school's work – the curriculum, and social, recreational and cultural activities had developed to produce the wide scope of interests and facilities vital to pupils today.

He praised the way in which pupils had taken advantage of these developments and that this was more than just rewarding or encouraging – he regarded this as excellent.

Every line in his report was a tribute to the versatility of talents and high work rate of a first- class team.

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