

I started school at Heathfield, College Road, Harrow, when I was nine in Miss Boobyer's class.

The first thing before this that I remember was my interview with Miss Norris in her office: apparently, I amused her by stories about my family and that my mother spent all day clearing up after us, only for us to come in after school and dirty it all up again! My sums were bad she informed me but my compositions were excellent so I got a place.

My first recollection of the classroom was feeling totally hot and embarrassed when I insisted that I had FOUR brothers when introducing me, the teacher said I actually had three. I reiterated I had FOUR.. my beloved third brother had been drowned only a month before but, to me, he was still my brother. No one seemed to appreciate this.

From then on, I would say my experience of Heathfield was similarly chequered – defiance and not wanting to conform were the norm for me. I also felt that unless you were a “swot” or good at games, you were not particularly valued. In Upper Two, I remember a geography exam where we were asked which of two countries that we had been studying about we would prefer to live in. I honestly did not want to live in either and wrote this and why. However I got marked severely down for not answering the question “correctly.” Similarly, I enjoyed learning the piano with dear Miss West (who had lost much of her hair the story alleged when she saw her female companion fall under a tube train). She was a lovely pianist and a

gentle soul who was always saying “steady, steady now” as I rattled through my pieces.

The head of department insisted all girls of around a decent standard play at morning assemblies. I absolutely hated the idea but had to do it once. (For some reason playing a very basic version of Mozart’s Death March). Seeing no way out of monthly repetitions, I stopped taking lessons and eternally regretted it though have continued playing into my sixties.

Most of Lower Two and Upper Two memories are about playing horses in the playground with my two best friends, Rosalind Ward and Kathryn Watson. We used our little shoulder purses as reins, one of us the horse, the other the rider. I well remember the day, looking out of a window during a particularly geography boring lesson, seeing Kathryn, excused afternoon school, as she went off to welcome her REAL pony to her home, a dream that never came my way. My father did promise me one if I passed the 11+ and therefore did not have to pay any more school fees, in the confident (and correct) knowledge there was no way that I would.

From the third form when placed in 3Alpha (the non scholastic one it was known as) I really turned off everything scholastic concerned with trying.....I adored French (even making a tape for others with the French teacher Mamoiselle Justamon for others to use), writing stories at which I excelled and nearly always got As for homework, suffered Biology (the cycle of the liver fluke and all parts of a flower I can still bore people with) because I loved the teacher, Mrs Ruguski....large and tall with wonderful wavy black hair, grey eyes and splendid white teeth.

She once told me off soundly in the front of the class for playing about (actually I was, as always, sitting chattering at the back). She declared I never tried at anything except English, for which, she said “I was a genius”. I was so enthralled by this statement that I knuckled down and got exemplary exam results for the next couple of years though interest had waned again by the time “O” levels came around.

By this time I managed only to pass the two English “O” levels, French (of course at grade 1) Religious Knowledge (again, because I loved Miss Ramsay. She had soft brown eyes and a wonderful way of telling us about Jesus whom to this day I admire because of her, though was ever an atheist even at 15), and lastly Needlework (which I quite liked because I could make things for my baby sister. Also, importantly, Miss Johnson our teacher loved hearing anecdotes about my large chaotic family whilst I regularly went up to her desk to show her errors in my grubby piece of sewing. By the time I had told her as much as I could think of, usually over embellished to sustain her interest, she had often completed a whole hem or intricate piece of smocking for me and the bell was about to go.)

Armed with my five passes, I left Heathfield for college where I began to study properly to become a journalist and later attained a Teaching Certificate with distinction and passed a scholarship to Cambridge university.

I therefore look back at Heathfield not as a place of learning or where I felt valued or indeed did anything to make myself valued. However I had the most terrific time there, mainly because of my marvellous friends, firstly the horsey crowd which including

Rosalind and Kathryn mentioned above, but also Carol Hood and Angela Huggins who had an absolute marvellously jolly mother).

Then later when most of us swapped horses for boys I had memorable times swapping stories (usually exaggerated of course) about who had the most Valentine Cards, who had a new boyfriend and, indeed, who had “gone the whole way”. A beautiful quiet girl in the A class was, surprisingly, the only one who admitted to this! I was very close to Jane Butters (fashionable, pretty Jane whose mother was fashion buyer for Dickins and Jones), Pauline Simkins, Angela Bowles and Maggie Paterson but rarely saw any of them out of school as I socialised mainly with my youngest brother’s friends from John Lyon School which was up over Harrow fields. I also loved it when my second eldest brother came back from the Navy and used to pick me up (totally against school rules) at the gates on his Vespa. I used to pretend he was my boyfriend and had many envious glances from other girls particularly sixth formers!

My “special” friend from Upper 11 onwards was Hilary Daniels, Hilly – the one and only person with whom I am still in contact. She lived near Harrow fields and we spent hours at the week end walking the meadows and just chatting, chatting, chatting, then back to her house and more hours chatting, chatting, chatting until I went home, literally hoarse. We still meet up and can continue almost from where we last left off! Why we were such friends I don’t know. She was very academic, very science-based, very disapproving of my flirtatious behaviour with boys, didn’t ride and was an amazing swimmer, lacrosse and netball player. Opposites attract? Maybe. We did both have little sisters whom we adored, and still do, and now have children and grandchildren that we discuss endlessly.

My last recollection of Heathfield days is told rather apprehensively as I could REALLY be reprimanded by my alma mater this time!

On the last day of term, I and a band of renegade friends rampaged through the junior department hooting and hallooing. We arrived in Miss Woodhouse's classroom, Upper 1, and on her table I spied the junior school bell which, without fail, she always rang loudly to call us to order after breaks and lunch hour. Readers, I stole it. I still have it. I often wondered guiltily what she did without it.

I even wrote a poem about it which was published in a Forward Press anthology. (I attach both picture and poem.) Imagine my anxiety when someone who attended Heathfield years later after my time, wrote telling me how much she liked the poem... I do hope she hasn't snitched on me.

I also have a school photo of me, aged 11, looking fairly angelic with a fringe in July 1959 standing next to my friend Elizabeth Barder with all the teachers I have mentioned and many more (and pupils) whose names and characters instantly spring to mind as I survey the neat rows....one could go on for hours! I left, ironically, the year Miss Norris retired...perhaps she couldn't envisage Heathfield without me?!

Happy times! Jenny Harrow (NÉE LAWRANCE) Heathfield pupil: 1957-64.



## The Junior School Bell

It squats here on my window sill,  
the Junior School bell,  
worn handle, clanger bound with garden twine.

Sometimes I stand at the door and shake it hard  
to stir the lime trees down our silent road.

Decades past, gnarled Miss Woodhouse  
swung it from her classroom door  
and identical girls came running,  
forming rows as straight as pencils.

As we processed inside,  
she'd stop someone out of step,  
someone she didn't like...like me.

On my last day, I stole into her room and took it.

Then we left, screaming like banshees,  
tossing our felt hats over hedges  
to the clang of the Junior School bell.

(Forward Press Anthology "Tides of Life" Autumn '09)