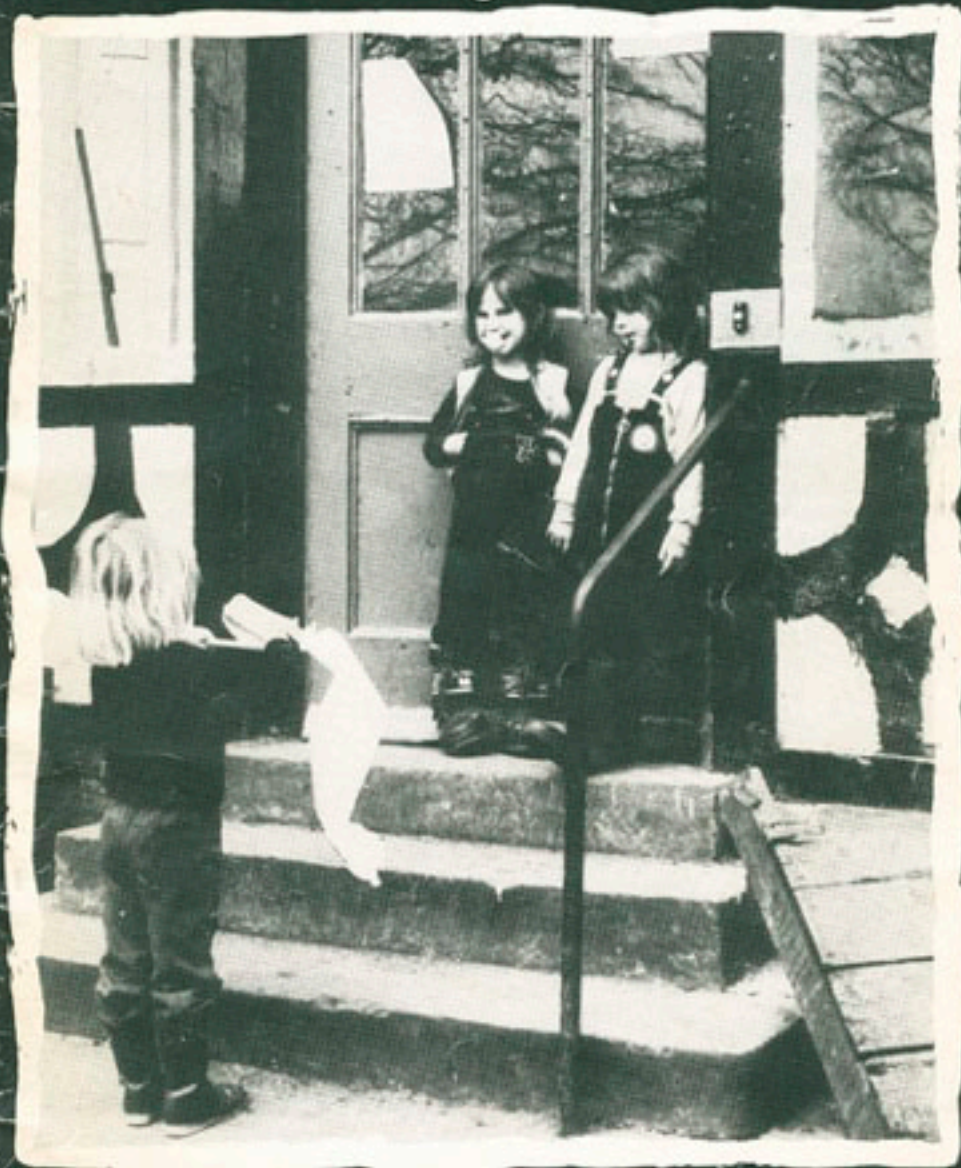


NO ORDINARY SCHOOL



Kirkdale - a living alternative

"Most organisms appear to be self-regulating, (by which we mean in general that they have an inborn tendency to seek whatever conduces to good health and development).

"Mankind can be self-regulating as much as any other species, but the process is much more complicated, and consequently much more easily disturbed."

"To lead a satisfactory life it is necessary for human beings to enjoy some measure of acceptance, approval and affection from their fellows. Rejection and hatred lead to illness and even death.

"The adults in the school have the responsibility for trying to understand the behaviour and attitudes of the children. This means that anti-social conduct and non-co-operation is treated with tolerance and sympathetic consideration, and that we use no punitive sanctions."

(SUSIE POWLESLAND
co-founder of Kirkdale School)

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Kirkdale School
186 Kirkdale
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rosie

SOME FACTS ABOUT KIRKDALE

Kirkdale School has approximately thirty children. They are divided into three age groups – the Bees, aged between three and a half and five; the Wasps, aged between five and eight; and the Hornets, aged between eight and eleven. The pupil staff ratio is kept deliberately at about eight to one. This gives each child the opportunity to form close relationships with the adults here.

Kirkdale is a democratic community, and as such we have no head teacher. We run ourselves as a parent/teacher co-operative. This means that families and staff work together to run the school, make decisions, and perform the maintenance work.

Kirkdale is completely self-sufficient financially, all expenses being shared by the parents. Contributions are kept to a minimum, and we have a number of free places given to those families who cannot afford to contribute. This is not an ideal system and we are far from happy with it, but so far it is the only one which provides parents with genuine control of their children's school lives.

This booklet is made up of contributions from some of Kirkdale's members, children and adults. We hope they represent the various opinions and feelings we have about our school, and some of its unique essence and spirit.



Mini

Polly

SOME VIEWS ON KIRKDALE – the Bees (3½-5 year olds)

Why do you like Kirkdale?
I like to go swimming.

Why do you like the garden?
It has a climbing frame.
There are paddling pools and lots of
room to run about.

PETER – a parent ✓

Kirkdale School proclaims itself on a battered sign above the gate. It is seventeen years old, and a vigorous adolescent. No doubt the casual passer by, glancing into the unkempt garden, wonders if the ragged, mud bespattered children who run and shriek through the aged rhododendrons are not part of some institution for the under privileged – orphans perhaps. But no, this is Kirkdale, a fee paying private school.

Why is it, on a quiet day in the holidays, as I walk up the gravelled drive towards the old Victorian house, that it feels suddenly like being in the country, as though the busy throughfare of the road at the bottom of the garden were part of another, uglier world? Does the earth remember the generations of eager children who have cooked sausages out here on campfires, made secret hideouts in the bushes, fought epic remakes of the world's great battles fit in their imaginations to rival any Hollywood spectacular? Does it remember the children who have laughed, loved, cried and blessed it in their hearts if not so knowing in their thoughts?

If there is something timeless, anachronistic even, about the school, then it is surely related to the children. Teachers and parents come and go, children grow up and go to the local comprehensive, become young men and women, and go to work. But the children are always there – different faces, the same feelings. The rituals, the laughter, the tree houses, the games, the traditions are all played – the kingdom of childhood is a land apart. At bonfire night, for example, there is a fancy dress party, fireworks on the climbing frame, hot soup and flapjacks, dancing and beer and talk around the fire, singing maybe and the reunion of old friends. Somehow, whatever the well meaning interference of us benevolent adults, the children go their own way, struggle to preserve and develop their own image.

Do you like the Hornets?

Yes, because my brother is here.
I like going home with his friends.

Not that these are little angels by any means. There is plenty of horseplay and raucous laughter; there are shrill quarrels and the occasional fisticuffs. No! – wings of gauze would not stay on these children long. And yet perhaps there is perhaps something cherubic there – an innocence, a brightness and an insouciance. "There is a little bit of every living thing in a person," my seven and a half year old daughter suddenly told me. "There is a bit of cat, sheep, horse..." I wonder where that one came from? "Winter is beautiful too Daddy", she said as we trudged through the snow bound park, the bare trees startlingly black against the glitter of the snow, the white dogs looking dirty. Or once she said to me at the age of four and with great authority, "Don't say 'don't' to me."

For me the best thing about Kirkdale is that it is a living organism, not a fossil, dying beneath the fading vision of some once charismatic leader past his prime, bound by the rigidities of his aging spirit. Here, no one lays down the law, no-one is indispensable. What is essential is that the interplay of personalities in which we are each obliged to learn from the other, for no-one can impose their will. If we can accept to be challenged not to have our own pet vision of the school realised, then we grow as people and as a school. For all of us, adults as well as children, relationships are the great teachers. And the children usually learn better than us from their relationships, for they really express their feelings. "Go away, we don't like you." "I like your earrings." "You're not my best friend." The children are constantly teaching each other to be good citizens of their little society. If you relate to people by kicking them they'll refuse to play with you; if you sit mousey quiet in a corner, too timid to contribute, you'll be left to sit; if you're too bossy you'll be shunned in favour of others more amenable.

They do learn to read and write, they do learn number skills, craft skills, music, drama, cooking and so forth. But no skill, however refined and developed, will create a peaceful world. It is the qualities of heart, so lacking in our world, that will ultimately determine not whether the children will be rich, famous and lionized by society, but whether they will be good human beings, at peace with themselves and their fellows.

Why do you like being a Bee?

You don't have to do any work.
You don't have to play. It has the
warmest fires and comfortable
cushions and carpets.

No school is a panacea. But at least here at Kirkdale we have an opportunity, teachers and parents, to help each other towards our fulfilment as human beings. We are the models for our children, they will inherit our legacy – not only of material things, but of compassion, insight, sensitivity, intelligence and wisdom, in the measure that we are able to make these available to them from our own store. These cannot be forced on them at school or home, but rather absorbed by osmosis, as we live our lives together. Kirkdale is a great school, and it grows and changes. The school is us, we are the school; what we become the school becomes. For all of us this is an adventure and a challenge. It's not up to the Minister, or the Board of Examiners, or the Governors, or heaven knows who else, it's up to us, and we like it that way.



A N Y A Tanya

Do you like the Wasps?

Yes, they're nice, sometimes they're
not.

ALEX – a teacher

After working in a state primary school and at Kirkdale, I have come to some conclusions about how children and adults spend their time in the two institutions.

The clearest difference that I can see between the practice of teaching in a state school, and that of being at Kirkdale is that conventional wisdom in conventional schools tells us that people do not know what they are doing, and have to be told. Children, especially, therefore can only be expected to make the most trivial decisions about the running of their own lives and the life of their communities. Kirkdale starts from the opposite assumption, namely that we all know what we are doing, and can run our lives accordingly.

The practice that has grown from this positive assumption over the 17 years of Kirkdale's existence has given rise to a healthy, functioning, democratic community. The children and adults work together to create an atmosphere of freedom – not a false freedom defined only by an absence of oppressive regulations, but a freedom that is a process of collectively realising our individual desires. This is not a freedom that can be granted by kind or liberal adults who believe that they know better than children what is good for them. It is not a child-centred teaching method, making sure that children discover the correct portions of the seamless coat of learning. It is not a special atmosphere for emotionally deprived children who need close relationships in order to become adjusted to the "real world". Rather, it can only grow from the knowledge that we all know best for ourselves, that we learn what we need because we need it, and that we all need close relationships in order to realise our common humanity. In my experience, and in that of those who have experienced this process of freedom, Kirkdale is a success.

NIKKI – a Youth Opportunities Worker

First up the muddy beaten track, stepping to avoid the clay, up the steps through the door to the office. Coat off quickly so as not to be late, I bound down the stairs and settle down to a little crochet by the orange glow of the gas fire.

By 10 am my stomach notices its lack of breakfast and groans till half past like an automatic snacks alarm. Up the stairs to the office, I make a quick decision of what's appropriate – biscuits, nuts or popcorn etc.

A little reading, a little crochet, my lap squashed in, and bruised from David and Cyrus' back massages, I finally come to the end of the day, sweeping for those who have scived clearing-up, making the tables into tower blocks with chairs. Then turning the sun off at a light switch, I walk out under the grey sky, back down the trodden path, like a pilgrim, down to the gate and into the world of tarmac.

The workings of Kirkdale are a part of this process of practising freedom. There are four types of formal decision-making bodies;

- 1) Group meetings; the groups of children meet with their teachers to determine their activities as a group.
- 2) School meeting; at which the day-to-day relationships between adults and children, and between children are discussed, together with our activities as a school. This meeting, among other functions, takes the place of any disciplinary structure. There are no punishments.
- 3) Staff meeting; at which the workers discuss their work, both teaching work and all other aspects of running the school. There is no headteacher.
- 4) Management meeting; open to all parents and workers, taking ultimate responsibility for the school's existence. There is no Board of Governors.

All the other decisions – when to paint a picture, where to hang it up, how to climb a tree, whose knee to sit on, are made by those involved.

Paul Goodman wrote that "we cannot know the laws of perfection, we can only create them." Kirkdale is a place where that creation has begun.



Guhan

Alex AdON



elizabeth

hannah

HELEN – a parent

Kirkdale's attraction for me is its open communication system. I think that all the people involved in Kirkdale have a desire to be potent and creative in their relationships with their children and others.

Within the school there is no headmaster who knows best, there are no rules without consensus (this can take weeks of discussion!) The teachers do not shut doors on parents once the kids walk through them. Financing the school is the problem of all of us. If the building is falling down we have to put it back up and so on

For many people the thought of such a set up would make them feel too insecure or vulnerable to function but it seems precisely the vulnerability that makes Kirkdale so alive. If one doesn't know what works in a given situation the only way to find out is through personal endeavour. It's this building of knowledge for oneself that I think we collectively agree is the only education worth having.



Joy

hannah



Clive

GUDRUN

CLARE – a friend of Kirkdale

The aim of Kirkdale School is to foster happiness by providing an environment in which children are free to be themselves. The children are considered as individuals who have rights; they have the right to decide for themselves whether to play, come to lessons, what to think and to be free to feel bored, tired, energetic, excited or melancholy. This does not mean that they are being neglected. Children are not entirely independent of the adults in their world. They need food, warmth and a loving environment which approves of them for who they are. They need to be hugged, they need to be comforted, they need to know adults are close at hand.

In his book "The Art of Loving", Erich Fromm points out that all the early experiences of childhood "become crystallised and integrated in the experience; I am loved. I am loved because I am mother's child. I am loved because I am helpless. I am loved because I am beautiful, admirable. I am loved because mother needs me. To put it in a more general formula: I am loved for what I am, or perhaps more accurately, I am loved because I am." Unconditional love is taken for granted by the child: "If it is there, it is like a blessing; if it is not there, it is as if all beauty had gone out of life – and there is nothing I can do to do to create it." In brief, children need to live without the fear that they are not loved.

In accepting children completely for what they are, as opposed to what an anxious parent or teacher might want them to be, it is important to understand what exactly children are. Of course, everyone of them is different, and every one of them is human, but in any group of which the majority are children, one must be able to accept noise, excitement, mud, and a "messy" environment. Children are not inhibited from expressing themselves by 'social etiquette' and it is crucial to Kirkdale's beliefs that the school fits the child rather than the child fitting what is the adult's conception of the school.

SOME VIEWS ON KIRKDALE – the Hornets (8-11 years old)

One day at Kirkdale, Tuesday –
cooking day. I hate writing out my
recipe. Sometimes I wish recipes
never existed especially long ones
JUSTIN (10 years)

We dug up the doctor's medicines,
needles and found a book on doctor's
stuff and found some bullets in the
back garden. It was exciting and that
was all. When I first came here I was
scared of the Hornets and especially
Clive and I got better and better. The
End.

POLLY (9 years)

Children have a natural desire to learn by virtue of the fact they live. Most of us at some time must have had some experience of the endless streams of questions children can ask: Why? How? Can? To encourage this learning positively, an environment without fear is essential. A school that has a headmaster/mistress, deputy, senior teachers and prefects, fosters fear because everyone has to justify him or herself to someone else. At Kirkdale, the child does not have to attend mathematics promptly at nine-fifteen, s/he can play outside without coming to lessons. There is no one to report her/him to the head. Neither is there a head. If a child wants to play 'monsters' but is made to read instead, it will have several possible negative effects: a. fear of the teacher who has the power to make her/him make something s/he does not want to do; b. dislike of books; c. resentment and introversion.

Many parents and teachers are afraid that their children will not learn to read unless they are made to. I see this as their projection of their own experiences on to the child. Most of us were made to learn to read and so see it as the only possible way. We fail to see reading as something that can be enjoyed by children and that they would choose to learn to read if left to their own devices. A child who is forced to do anything will not be experiencing the pleasure of that task, but will be more aware of the fear s/he feels for the power that forces her/him. At Kirkdale, all the children love books. Even if they have not yet learned to read they appreciate the value of books. Books are fantasy and books are fact. The children know this. The younger kids initially appreciate the pictures in books, which incidentally are a valuable source of learning. One can sense a young child almost stepping into the book, becoming part of the picture. Giants, dwarfs, fairies, even double decker buses, excite her/him into creative fantasy.

Play is crucial for learning. Children's senses are keen to sound, touch, taste, smell and sight. They are sensuous creatures and relate very naturally to the elements. For example a favourite pastime of the kids at Kirkdale is the sand pit. It is interesting to see that the older kids have become very sophisticated in their constructions. It is obvious that their projects incorporate mathematical concepts. Most of what the

At Kirkdale I like writing lessons but I
don't like Simon and David. They get
on my nerves and I wish they never
existed. I like everything else. I love
Polly and Joy.

MINI (8 years)

children learn through play filters its way back into the classroom where their learning and desire to learn is integrated with more formal skills. The children realise that an ability to read and write can help them greatly. They begin to understand that information such as "why are there worms?" can be found in a book. They are continually discovering new and exciting things. Water is refreshing, stones are hard, birds fly. They accept life and if they are free to learn all about it without restrictions they will love life and love learning. Life is learning, learning is life. It is not an unnatural process which requires firmness, formality or seriousness.

To discipline children into a structured environment is taking away their right to learn how to govern themselves. If children are making decisions for themselves throughout childhood, then they are likely to be more confident at making decisions as adults. Kirkdale believes that given the chance, children are quite capable of coping with making decisions for themselves. Discipline is often a way of making a child conform to the adult world. The child is disciplined to be clean, to be quiet, to have manners, to speak when spoken to, to have respect for elders. It's not difficult to understand the adult's need for all this discipline when the child is knee-deep in mud constructing a castle, but a child's need to play in this way is so intense and absorbing that we feel it a need to be respected. Obviously if a child wants to sit in mud and then on all the clean ironed washing, s/he should be stopped. Here the reason is a practical, not a moral one. If the child is being cleaned against her/his wishes to satisfy the adult's own personal standards of hygiene, then it is wrong. There is a big difference between freedom and licence, and the two should not be confused.

The Free School has, as stated by A S Neill, "a belief in the goodness of human nature, a belief that there is not and never was original sin." Children are not born bad, but can become unhappy and anti-social and destructive people if their free-flowing love of life is disturbed by neurotic and fearful adults, who teach them to fear God, to fear teachers, not to swear, to be clean and tidy, not to masturbate, and are horrified if a child compares cake mixture to her/his own faeces. Children are natural, open, honest. To punish them for swearing, being noisy, demanding

privacy, is to misunderstand childhood. If we do not want children to lie, then we cannot lie to them by trying to wash away an original sin that isn't there. Children will not lie unless they are afraid of the adult not accepting the truth, ie their own natural instincts, from them. To punish a child is to tell a child 'I do not love you, I disapprove'. The child is consequently unhappy and some of its love of life and learning turns to guilt. A fear that will grow. Kirkdale believes that if children live in happiness they are more likely to develop a positive attitude to life and learning, and the forming of loving relationships. If they live in fear, they are more likely to develop negative attitudes to the above. It seems appropriate to select a quote here from A S Neill's 'Summerhill':-

"The difficult child is the child who is unhappy. He is at war with himself; and in consequence, he is at war with the world.

"The difficult adult is in the same boat. No happy man ever disturbed a meeting, or preached a war, or lynched a negro. No happy woman ever nagged her husband or her children. No happy man ever committed a murder or a theft. No happy employer ever frightened his employees."

Most societies today live in fear. Fear of war, fear of muggers, fear of their headteacher, fear of the law, fear of god and fear of the devil. Fear is hatred and cannot by its very nature promote honesty and happiness. A S Neill said that -

"All crimes, all hatreds, all wars, can be reduced to unhappiness".

Kirkdale aims at being a positive organisation, to contribute as much as possible towards promoting a shift in attitudes towards education, bringing about social change. An attempt to bring awareness to people that all conflict and hatred in the world is a result of unhappiness which need not be so.

If we are concerned about world peace, then we must value the individual. Give our children freedom and watch them grow into the future generation. Have no fears that they will fail, and question deeply your standards of success.

Give peace a chance.



Tom

I go into the Hornets. Sometimes I do some crochet but most of the time I do a page in my spelling book. We do our projects. At half past ten we have snacks and after snacks sometimes I go into the Wasps and sometimes I go into the craftroom and at twelve we have lunch and someone goes up the shops and if you are lucky, there will be a fight with Justin and Simon.

TOM (10 years)



Rosie

Martin

CLIVE – a teacher

In a tumble down house in
Kirkdale,
People work, laugh, play, weep
and wail.
It's so full of fools
You might call it a school,
But by no stretch
Could you call it a jail.

MARTIN – a teacher

Kirkdale is a school for ordinary kids. We have our fair share of those who have found it particularly difficult to fit in within the state system, but on the whole our kids come here for positive rather than negative reasons. This gives the school an affirmative character which is of course the greatest assistance to those with the most problems. The closely knit and relaxed atmosphere allows everyone (both kids and adults) to grow creatively in acceptance of their differences.

As a worker at the school I find Kirkdale's past both a source of strength and a point of weakness. The intimate, co-operative atmosphere between parents, staff and kids which was the aim for the school of those people who founded Kirkdale is what makes the place so different from anywhere else. I feel extremely privileged to be able to work in an environment in which it is really possible to relate to kids as individual people and to feel capable of being myself with them.

However, the main source of money for the school has been parental contributions and they are still the life-blood of the enterprise. (This does not mean that Kirkdale is wealthy, on the contrary – we never have enough money to do what we want properly). To me the problem of money manifests itself in direct contradiction to the positive aspects of the school. For example, the staff have to accept a level of earnings and a degree of commitment which limits their effectiveness through sheer exhaustion, and in fact which determines that only those who are young and without commitments can work here. Another problem is that although we do what we can to prevent it, we lose kids for financial reasons. I think this is terrible because the major challenge for Kirkdale would be to make what happens here more available to a wider variety of kids. For me it's an exciting place to be, but I would hate to see the optimism of its beginnings in the '60s die in the harsh economic climate of the '80s.



Ben

Ex pupil BILLY (aged 21) interviewed by Heather

Billy has been one of the least academically interested children at Kirkdale and yet, as far as he and we are concerned, very successful in his life.

H. How old were you when you came?

B. 3½

H. Can you remember what it felt like, your first day here.

B. Not exactly – it just felt good. I played all day.

H. Were you aware as a small child that this was a different school to others.

B. I realised when I came into contact with other children, when I was about 5 or 6. I started to draw comparisons between what they did and what we did.

H. Did it make you feel different to other kids?

B. I felt I was lucky being able to do what I wanted all day long. I remember walking past other schools and seeing them in their playgrounds cooped up behind iron bars. I felt good that I was allowed to do exactly what I wanted.

H. Did you feel any pressure from anyone here to learn how to read and write?

B. Well, there were always the lessons going on here every day and the majority of people went to them. They didn't interest me – I never considered learning to read or write. There were too many other things to do – I always wanted to be in the garden. I enjoyed all the practical things here like carpentry and building tree houses and the experiments in science.

When I got older I did feel a little bit embarrassed not knowing where the bus went and things like that and all my friends here were writing and reading books and I got to feel that I was missing out. I got to the stage at about 11 when I knew I just had to learn to read and write and I applied myself. I learned within six months. I had a reading age at 11½ of a 13½ year old.

H. When you moved on to secondary school were you at the same standard as the others?

B. Well, there were a lot of things I didn't know, for example in maths, but I certainly wasn't the dumbest child in the school. I didn't take long to adjust and learn. It's quite natural really – the children had had a different education where everything had been drummed into them. I didn't know as much as them academically, but it didn't take long for me to gain confidence and catch up with them and become bright – not the brightest in the school but competent to do what I was asked reasonably well.

H. Do you think your initial lack of confidence at your secondary school had a long lasting effect on you?

B. No, not at all. I did quite well there – I loved English, geography, sports, woodwork and metal work. The things I was interested in I did very well indeed – the things I wasn't interested in I just didn't bother doing. This was left over from Kirkdale.

When I was 15 I told my parents I'd had enough of the school and didn't really want to be there any more. All I was really interested in apart from English and Geography was all the practical things. I left and was taught at home. I love English and did English language and literature 'O' levels. I just worked by myself really – Dad helped me here and there – well, he just talked to me about the books really – and I got 2 'B's. They were the only exams I ever took. I wouldn't have bothered taking them but as I loved it so much I thought I may as well.

H. Do you think the two 'O' levels have helped you in any way?

B. No, I knew they never would.

At that time you see I had quite a lot of building skills. Myself and 2 other kids from school had started this building company called 'Mosquito Enterprises' when we were about 13. We did jobs for friends, things like stripping wall paper, painting, simple carpentry, anything we could do. We did this in the holidays and did quite well really. By the time I was 15 I had quite a lot of building skills and then I met a builder who employed me just as his mate really. He paid me £60 a week and taught me a tremendous amount. He was a good builder, very orthodox, and he taught me very well. I worked for him for 2 years. He taught me structural work,

HANNAH (5 years old)



This is my school
We look through telescopes and do
sums if we want to. It is fun. I like school
very much. We have fetes and at the
end of term
we have a party

carpentry, everything really. When I left working with him I started again with Mosquito Enterprises.

H. When you worked for him, did you find it easy to keep to the commitment of regular hours?

B. Oh yes, it was good interesting work. I was learning something which I enjoyed very much and was also being paid good money. I was working all the time really, even at weekends, and what he taught me was brilliant.

H. Are you happy now, working as a carpenter?

B. Oh yes, I can't think of anything I prefer doing. It's good, worthwhile work, very creative. I can work from home, I work for myself always. I can't think of anything I would rather do.

H. What happened when you started up with Mosquito Enterprises again at 17?

B. We did a job for £1,500 doing up an architects office. We got really big. Then the other two went off to university and I was on my own and did very well. I started up a flour mill.

H. What do you mean you started it – do you mean you took on the whole thing. It sounds amazing to take on so much at the age of 17.

B. I suppose it was, but it didn't feel like that to me. Yes well, it was just an empty garage. I got a mill which I did up and kitted the whole place out starting from scratch. I had loads of problems – it took three months just to sort them out. I had to learn a tremendous amount – V.A.T., dealing with authorities (tax people and the health authority), the day to day running of a business, which was really hard at first because I didn't know much about maths. I mean I knew the basics, but I never had a specific use to use maths for. It was just a matter of learning it.

H. How did you learn it? Did you go to other people for help?

B. Yes, I talked to various people, my Dad and so on, and just had a go. I found out information as I went along, as I needed it.

H. Did you feel embarrassed as an adult not to know these things?

B. Well, I mean I wasn't hopeless at maths of course. I knew the basics. It was just the more applied maths you needed for running a business.



Corrina



This is my school.
This is part of the garden.
In the garden we have three sandpits.
It is very exciting, isn't it?

H. Do you get enough work now that you are self-employed?

B. Yes. I have about 3 months work lined up now. I turn away jobs. It pays whatever you build to build it well, build it to your best.

H. Are you earning enough money from it?

B. Yes I am. I don't like working every day, but I try to estimate for about £170-£200 a week. A lot of that goes straight on to tools, which are horrendously expensive.

H. How did you actually feel towards the teachers here? It seems to me watching the children here that the teachers are their friends, who they can rely on.

B. Yes, it was very much like that. They were our friends, very much so. We knew them, they knew us and our families. I didn't look up to them as adults, but more as people we could rely on and who would help us to see to our needs.

H. Did you feel a sense of community?

B. Yes very much so. There was always a sense of co-operation between the Bees and the Wasps. We did things very much together especially in the garden. Although the lessons were separate, we could go from one classroom to the other. If someone was having a story we could wander in and listen. If you didn't want to do what your teacher was doing you could wander off and play in the garden of course, or you could go and see what the others were doing.

H. When you were older yourself how did you feel towards the little ones?

B. We felt caring towards them. The older ones had always been caring towards me. The ones that struck me as nice people we played with. We responded to them not as Bees, positively or negatively, but as individuals.

H. Have you got any regrets about going to Kirkdale?

B. It's the best thing my parents could have done for me.

H. Do you wish you had more qualifications? Do you feel you would have more control of your life if you had more qualifications?

B. I think I would have been in a much worse situation, I really do.

Most of my friends here at Kirkdale have been through University or are at University at the moment. There are not many of my friends who have not at least done their 'O's and 'A's. They've got qualifications and no jobs. I feel they've just wasted their time.

Most people I know at 18 years are going to college as a way to get away from home, as a way to experience life on their own. I feel it as quite disturbing that people use that opportunity just to get away from home and get some money. As far as I can see most people seem to waste a lot of time there. They seem to do very little so I'm really glad, looking back on it (well, I suppose I was quite a practical person anyway) that I didn't have the academic pressure to make me feel I had to have qualifications to survive in this life. As far as I can see it's the reverse for me. Now I have a proper trade, and everyone always needs carpenters. I work for myself, I don't have to apply to a big company for a job, and I find it exciting. I can do what I want, what I think is creative. I have no regrets at all. I feel quite sorry for some other people at Kirkdale, that that's what they did. Now they can't get a job and feel disillusioned. They realise after their three years of growing up, I suppose you could call it, "what can I do now, I must get a job, even a shitty one, and there aren't many of those left either." Often now a degree isn't enough to get a job. I didn't see it that way at the time I was making those kind of choices for myself - I just knew I didn't want to move on to academics when I was 15 even though parts of it I really enjoyed - I realise now that the future was with my hands. But not everyone's like that I'm sure.

H. Was there a stage when you ever worried about not having 'O' levels.

B. Not really.

H. You seem as if you've had a lot of trust in yourself and faith that you could look after yourself.

B. Well, I always knew I could look after myself, right from the days when I worked with Mosquito Enterprises, earning my money at something I could do and enjoyed. I don't think I actually looked too far ahead, things just seemed to come along. I didn't actually worry too much about what was going to happen in 6 months time. Of course I looked ahead, but not very far. I'm lucky. I've met lots of people who



This is part of the garden.
Tanya is in the garden with Touloula.
That is the school's cat. We have a
straw cat too.

have offered me jobs, I've met people who I can learn from, and I've met people who have had faith in me to do a job that I've not done before. It's a lot to do with the confidence to go and do something and not just sit around and worry. I think this has a lot to do with Kirkdale. In fact this is what Kirkdale is all about really, learning through experience, and having the confidence to feel capable. I suppose I am quite confident that things will work, and I think if you are this tends to make things work. Kirkdale gave me an enormous amount just actually relating to people. I came into contact with a lot of people, lots of adults as well, and I felt on the same par with them. I could communicate with them, ask them lots of questions and not feel they're adults and I'm a kid, and I shouldn't ask them these questions. We were free to communicate and make friends with adults and feel on a par with the teachers.

H. How do you feel this has affected you? Do you feel privileged now, as an adult?

B. Yes, very much so. Well, I was. Most kids don't have that opportunity and for me it's worked really well. I benefited an enormous amount from it. For example, I have to deal a lot with business men or my bank manager who has a lot of influence over what I do. I can go and talk to them as equals, and express myself - I don't say what they want to hear. Yes, of course I judge what they want to hear and work around it, say what I feel in a way that they will understand. I can meet people who are very high in their own particular field, with me not so, and I can get on very well.

H. Do you tell people about your background?

B. Not many. Often I meet people who can't comprehend it at all. It hasn't entered their heads that children learn much better in every sense if they find out for themselves. I was left to find out what I wanted to do, and what I was good at. Of course the teachers encouraged the things I showed interest in. They would help me in anything I wanted to do.

H. Do you find it easy to discipline yourself in the things you actually enjoy doing?

B. Very much so.

H. Because I don't, even something which I enjoy doing, I tend to put off sometimes.

B. Well, it all depends what it is



This is of the sand pits and Gudrun has built a sand castle. Isn't it lovely? I wish I could build one like that.

H. Say with your work, even though you enjoy it, it must be very easy because you work for yourself, to have days when you have difficulty getting down to it.

B. On the whole I'm pretty good about it, and get down and do it. I find great peace in my work, building something which I personally find creative. Often I get jobs, not so much now but I used to, which were boring, and I knew I had to do them because I needed the money.

H. And could you do it?

B. Yes, I think this is what Kirkdale teaches you – if you're interested in something, if you want something – you have to go ahead and do it. I work for myself so what I put into my work comes directly back to me.

H. As a teenager, when your world became larger than Kirkdale, did you feel different to other teenagers? Did you go back to Kirkdale people for your friendships?

B. I stayed with Kirkdale friends because we knew each other so well, but that wasn't prohibitive to meeting and making friends with other people.

H. Did you feel you were more mature than other teenagers of your own age?

B. Often. I tended to choose friends who were older than me. It wasn't that I couldn't associate with people of my own age, but I preferred to be with older people.

H. Did you feel that you were more mature in your relationships with girls as a teenager than other boys?

B. Very much so. That was the major difference when I left Kirkdale and went to other schools. There was no embarrassment about bodies or the basic facts at Kirkdale and no squeamish giggles. At Kirkdale there is no boys sticking to the boys, and no girls to the girls. When I went to secondary school there was a real separation between the boys and the girls. I learnt so much in those years about other people and how they had been brought up. It was quite a shock really to discover that the girls were the girls and had to play their role and the boys were the boys and had to play their role. It was very much like that. I didn't hear what the girls said about sex, but the boys were very hot up about it. We had sex education and they all tittered and laughed, whereas I knew it all before and was just interested really.

This tension between boys and girls was my experience for the whole of the rest of my education.

H. Your mother is an adult literacy teacher. Do you think she ever doubted that she was creating in you the very problem she is trying to correct in adults?

B. No, no, not at all. I actually asked her this a while ago. She said what a child needs is good physical caring in a loving and supportive atmosphere. She was confident in what I was learning and that I was learning a lot – sewing, knitting, woodwork and building and confident I would come to realise the importance of reading and writing, which is what happened. As I said, I applied myself and learned within six months. It was very easy then.

She hasn't always worked with adults. Until about five years ago she worked as a remedial teacher in a state school, but with very little resources. She enjoys working with adults much better because the adults want to learn to read and write. They realise that it's a serious disability and they say (and some of the people are old age pensioners) that this is the first time in their lives that they have been given the opportunity to read and write in a non-embarrassing atmosphere.

H. Do you feel confident to read any book that takes your interest?

B. Oh yes – I've read and I read a lot.

H. Do you think about what would happen if you had children of your own?

B. Oh yes. I don't want children unless I can support them in a fair way, and one of the ways would be sending them to Kirkdale or a similar place. Kirkdale has given me so much, I feel it would be unfair to any children I have not to give them that chance. It would be totally against the grain for me, after being given so much here, not to offer a similar upbringing to my kids.

H. Well, I think that's about it. We seem to have covered a large area. It's been good – I've enjoyed talking to you.

B. Oh, I love talking about Kirkdale. I had a great time – I look back on it and think Wow! Also, I learned so much about carpentry there – it's given me such a strong foundation for my work now.



Clock work show. We do shows. Sacha does Detective Dooms'. All the rest are ordinary so you see it is a very nice school, isn't it?