

The initial shock of leaving my friendly, warm and safe Primary school, and entering this strange, cold and seemingly endless high school was increased by the knowledge that I was not a "big girl" as I was in Primary school, but I was just a small insignificant first year.

However, after the excitement had worn off, I finally realised exactly what I had lying in store for me for the next five years.

I attended Devonport High School for Girls from 1980 to 1985, and although I had good fun and managed to get a few 'O' levels, it did nothing to prepare me for reality.

I always felt as if the school was designed to make pupils into ideal models. And the ideal model was a girl who was Captain of the Hockey team, organised sponsored walks, always wore the correct uniform and no make-up, no jewellery and sensible hairstyle; she also was incredibly intelligent at every subject available from needlecraft and cookery to physics and computer studies. Her life was mapped out for her: after passing all her 'O' levels, she would stay on for 'A' levels, then obviously to University for 4 years doing a course in something femininely intelligent, maybe have a couple of years working, and then the inevitable marriage, followed closely by two children, a dog, a semi-detached house, in suburbia.

If anybody wanted to try anything different or wasn't academic, the standard response was, "You should have gone elsewhere."

I've never actually wanted to do metalwork or technical drawing or play rugby, but if at the age of 14, I'd decided that my future lay that way, would I have regretted the school I chose at 11?

Another thing about school was the way, simply enough, in which I was taught. For such a good reputation that Devonport High possessed, the staff were overworked, the classes too big and the teachers, in my mind, not well-equipped to deal with us. My 15 year old mind needed a firm, interesting teacher for me to possibly want to learn. At 15 years old, my mind was on other subjects, such as boys, clothes, make-up, discos. I also have a low concentration capacity, my mind easily wanders onto other subjects; but even I noticed that if I was in a lesson with a particularly boring, droning type of teacher my results were poor, and I had no interest in the subject whatsoever. Take another teacher and another subject, a teacher who was switched on, interesting, firm and lively, and the difference was amazing.

I can't really say exactly how I felt at school because when I look back on my school days now, they always seem to have been happy and quite carefree, and yet looking through my private diary which I started to write in the beginning of the fourth year, it is filled with what a horrible day I'd had that day, and how I worried over exams (and yet still couldn't be bothered to revise for them), and the shame of getting low grades. Which just goes to show how distorted my views have become over a relatively short period of two and a half years. I'll always keep my diary to remind me of how I felt in those days, because although the things I wrote in my diary now seem so trivial and petty, I realise that at the time they were huge problems for me. My main regret about the school was the lack of training for outside life. The whole school system was geared to 'A' level students and Universities, etc. A classical example of how unfair the system was is this: work experience was only allowed to those people in the 5th form who were staying on for 'A' levels. If you were leaving, you weren't entitled, there was no guide, no hints, no thing given to us in preparation for outside life and work. We were, literally, thrown on the streets with Y.T.S. forms, something on Supplementary Benefit and a couple of booklets on further education.

I felt that if only for one year in the 5th form, for one hour, once a week, we could have been given a lesson of advice, talks and information, of everything from unscrupulous landlords to drugs, from V.D. to job interviews, it would have made a lot of difference. I believe we did once have a woman come round and discuss the dangers of cigarettes and drugs, but it wasn't very informative, or so I felt.

It was basically just a very old fashioned school with out- of-date equipment.