

At the end of May I 'officially' left school (only I didn't). I still have the big 'O' level exams to look forward to and then I'll have left school (but I won't). I have made the decision to return in September and subject myself to another two years of books, learning and bitchiness. To many people who claim to hate school this would seem like madness, but when I really think about it, what other options are there for me?

I suppose I could leave school and join the other school-leavers looking for jobs, but they are so rare these days the chances are incredibly rare that I'll find one. Would I be exploited because of my age or discriminated against because of my sex? Those worries are two hassles which I feel I'll be less likely to worry about in two years time after my 'A' levels. Working in a job isn't that easy either. You have to budget yourself, fill out loads of forms and pay all the appropriate taxes (something really quickly thrown at us a few weeks before the end of May, just so that we would all know what a P.45 form looks like in case we flunked the exams). Now at least I know what a P.45 looks like but I need a copy of the Oxford Dictionary to fill the stupid thing out.

Another option which I could consider is the well publicised Youth Training Scheme, but I really don't fancy that at all. My dislike for the scheme came about after a trip to see a Y.T.S. exhibition in the Guildhall with the other 60 or so members of the Fifth Year (bear in mind that 99% of us had already decided it was pretty dodgy before we went, but we got dragged along even though we told the teachers we didn't want to do it). There were several stands strewn around the place with work 'men' building a wall (and then knocking it down again), and even the opportunity to try out one of those price-tag things (something the girls were encouraged to do while the 'men' did the 'real work'). For these people who are bound to become the dreary sales people of tomorrow, there's even the possibility of proper work and promotion to till using (is it any wonder I don't want to do this???). Then again, I suppose it beats sticky labels! Well, I'm glad to see that the youth of today are being taught such meaningful and important tasks. Do the adults who dream up such schemes think that the youth of today are a bunch of idiots? Without meaning to sound rude I think that a one-eyed budgie with a squint would be just as capable of doing such a job. Is this what slogging over a desk has achieved, since we first began at the tender age of five? I appreciate that it costs a lot of money to run such schemes but I'm sure that the money would be much better spent training people to become more than dreary shop assistants with blank expressions on their faces. Perhaps my decision to do 'A' levels is a better one than those few (and I stress few) people I know who have chosen the big wide world or the Y.T.S.

When I first became a member of P.H.S., I was really proud to be a part of the school. (I still am, but I have learnt a lot since those first few weeks as a first year.) I even wore my regulation uniform with pride (I now realise my mistake as did the rest of them a few months into the first term). Off came the blazer with the starched lapels and shoulder pads (or else the collar was turned up a bit). Off came the 'A' line skirts which re-emerged shorter and tighter. Off came the 'kipper-like' ties, which returned tied up at the thin end with some of the white stripes 'tastefully' removed with a compass. I don't suppose you can blame us for doing this as it was very difficult to look anything but stupid in your uniform (although the navy and white was very smart) and even more difficult to attract the opposite sex. Ah yes - BOYS. I wondered when they were going to get a mention. Boys have been the cause of many break-ups between friends, much bitchiness (usually about the girl if her boyfriend is particularly good looking) and several near fights. I go to a GIRL'S SCHOOL for God's sake! I really resented being grilled about my boyfriends; and when they didn't get the answers they were looking for, they had a good bitch about me anyway. I'm glad I don't go to a mixed school because there would probably have been several murders over the past few years (and that's not a good thing to have on your report card when you apply for a Y.T.S. is it?)

I have had lots of fun at P.H.S. since September 1982, with the most memorable times being the ones when we went completely mad (i.e. 'The Shaving Foam' fight, the now famous episode with Miss P's tyres, when we used to pull people back in through the windows after they had sneaked out to meet boyfriends probably doing the same, numerous water fights, ice cream throwing and the most ridiculous of the lot 'The-pick-someone-up-and-throw-them-in-a-puddle-because-it's-the-last-day-of-term' game) - all of which have been frowned on by the staff. I always respected the fifth years when I started P.H.S. (which probably had something to do with the fact that their uniforms always looked far trendier than ours, and they could always hit the ball really well and really low when they were playing tennis!) and I longed to be in a form with a five in front of its staff's initial. So now I am. I've gone from 1B (Mrs Budden, who thankfully didn't get too angry when we messed up her schedule on a school trip) to 2O (Pr Owens who always won the 'prettiest teacher' prize), 3P (Miss Monk - there were two M's that year so we had to use first-name terms, i.e. P for 'Pat'), 4C (Mr Clarke

who is still trying to teach my friends the life and times of Monsieur et Madame Marsaud) and 5G (Mr Griffiths fondly known as Biffo, because of his resemblance to the cartoon character). Although now as a fifth year I can kick people off the courts (unofficially of course), I'm sorry to report that my forehand has not improved much and the lower school show us 'oldies' little respect.

I can really have sympathy for the kids lower down the school because I see them doing similar things to us. I see the skirts get shorter and the sun tan lotion coming out in the summer term (I also see the dinner ladies screaming 'indecenty!' at them!). I can see the weary faces of the first years after doing the 1500 m. first thing in the morning (and I am pleased to leave that joy well behind me). I personally hope that in the 6th form I will not be talked down to as I have in the past and I'll accept the responsibilities I will be given. However I shall still feel sorry for the 4th years as they get told off for wearing too much make-up but at the same time feel angry with the enforcers of school rules for not noticing hoards of schoolgirls (and young ones at that) sneaking out to role a ciggy on the sly. Where do the priorities lie?

The actual school work hasn't been too bad (although some Physics and Chemistry has been a bit difficult to grasp) and lessons have actually been fun (some of the time). I think the 'them and us' attitude is really a myth. There are a few teachers I can really confide in and they are only human after all. I don't envy the task of teaching us knowing the things we put them through. For all the nice teachers there are also the bad ones. The ones who you feel always single you out and really hate you (or so you think). However there are those who would argue that it is pointless doing work which is purely academical and that will bear little relevance to their future lives (potential shop assistants perhaps?). There are those who have dreaded coming to school because they do not know who was going to be bitchy about them. There are those who are pitifully lonely because of bullying and those who seem to thrive on being the bully. We are all of an age where the patronising of the adults becomes a bit too nauseating for our liking. Rebelling against the system of ridiculous school rules is only a cry for attention, but this cry is seen as 'very immature' by staff. From those people's point of view it probably is very pointless doing subjects which you will probably never use in life, and struggling to complete work on time and put up with arguments can be difficult.

The education system is lacking in many ways but money is a big problem. The school attempts to raise money for its own funds and for other charities and events are often poorly supported (usually due to the fact that original suggestions of what to do cannot be agreed on and people suggest 'unsuitable' methods of making money). Too many people these days want something for nothing, so it's usually the faithful 'blazer-brigade' of the First Year who spend all their dinner money on watching Miss Untrendy, Come Dancing (?) and the ever present Top of the Pops (where 2nd and 3rd years make complete idiots of themselves pretending to be famous pop personalities and getting resounding 'nil' points making it second to none other than the television song contest!). I suppose that academically I have learnt a lot, but whether this will benefit me in the future, I'm not sure. School-life has its ups and downs (more 'downs' than 'ups' normally) and a lot of us still have a lot to learn about friendships and things like that, but now as we get older we are getting trusted a bit more so it is up to us to prove ourselves.

I shall look back over the past few years with mixed feelings. Even the simple task of shirt signing (traditional madness which eliminates the hassle of autograph books) couldn't be done with real feeling. It's really hard writing kind, sincere messages of 'Best wishes' and 'Good luck' to people you really wish would go and find a cliff to jump off. But, girls being girls, it's all forgotten in one long mascara running, stomach churning tearful farewell. I won't forget the bitchy remarks in a hurry, I can tell you.

Yet I still feel that the best times have been spent out of school on the trips to such exotic locations as Exeter Cathedral, Hereford Cathedral (where we messed up Mrs Budden's schedule by being half an hour late for the coach back. Hereford is in Wales, so I can understand her worry!), the donkey sanctuary, Cricket St Thomas Wildlife Park (where a banana lies mysteriously placed under an unsuspecting coat upon which an unsuspecting behind sat down) and Austria (when we went to Eumau and everyone fell in 'line' with their skiing instructor and duvets and underpants were thrown over balconies, and schoolgirls were kept under the watchful eye of staff who made sure 'none of that' went on). However, after previous 'raunchy' exploits, new rules have been set down for the forthcoming Newquay trip (exotic, eh?) and fortunately for us it's only natural for people to go a bit mad once in a while and it does relieve the sometimes boring days, but I don't think the lecture about our singing was necessary. The 5th year as a rule NEVER sing in assembly, so on the last 'official' day we made an effort to sing really well and LOUDLY. We couldn't help the fact that the rest of the school found it amusing!

Come on all you adults - give us a break (and some credit some of the time). In your youth you probably had the lecture about 'the youth of today' but that's no reason to give it to us. I'm not denying the fact that I've hated coming to school several times in the last 5 years. Your school days are (supposedly) the best days of your life. Give me the freedom and trust to live my life a bit and then we'll see.