

ORAL HISTORY EXTRACT TRANSCRIPT

'Fighting for our Rights' project

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Extract 1: Starting at St Philip's

I had no idea, I didn't even know there was a job going. Anyway, I cycled up, I was on the bike, I cycled up to the school, put--, was pushing the bike up the drive and thinking, what on earth, well no, I'd already had that sort of, I thought it was really lovely, but I didn't think for a second because I didn't have any experience of special needs, that I would get the job. But basically I was given the job before I was even interviewed. In those days things were very very different, he basically said, "Right, the job you'll be doing is this but we need you to say this basically now." So fortunately he did give me a couple of days, I ummed and ahhed over it for two days thinking, do I really want to go down this route, and then thought, well I've been sitting around saying I don't know where I'm going at Southborough, I might as well. And it changed my life, because I don't think I'd have stayed in teaching had I not started at St Philip's because it was a very different school. It was caring, it had a very pastoral heart, you could feel the heart of the school. You know, I'm not saying the kids weren't tricky at times, because they were children with special needs, but there was a real sense in which you were looking after the whole kids, and sometimes their families as well, you know, you were really--, there was a sense of care that I wasn't seeing and hadn't experienced in my secondary experience at Lincoln Road Boys' or Southborough Boys' and I thought, this is it for me. And it didn't take long before I had reached, you know, a place where I thought, this is, you know, I'm very happy in the profession in this particular school.

Extract 2: Proudest achievement

Do you know what, I mean it's going to sound ridiculous isn't it, but I am proud of the fact that when I go down the shops or when I go into Surbiton or when I go into Kingston and when I see an ex-student of mine, almost always they'll want to say hello, they'll want to, you know, they'll be happy to see me, and you know, we can have a conversation, can't really remember their names these days, but most of the time I will know who they are and I'm proud that they'll want to, because it's not always, you know, so sounds ridiculous. In terms of what I've achieved, I think when I got to St Philip's I sort of, I mean it was almost like falling in love, I hadn't expected quite what I got, and not to put too fine a point on it, I was going through not only a professional moment in my life where I was questioning what I was doing in teaching, but I was also going, at that stage in my life I was going through personal changes as well, in my situation, and it all came to a bit of a head. So St Philip's was almost like the stability. And so when I got there, in the--, by the mid '80s I'd decided, you know, this is it, I don't really want to go anywhere else, you know, I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing. And of course as things progressed and as education changed and St Philip's changed and the local authority put new changes in place, I managed to ride the wave upwards, but it wasn't--, I was never ambitious to do that, it's never something I wanted, you know, that all the opportunities have virtually come to me on a plate, so I've been very lucky from that point of view. So what I was able to do I think was to take my love for the school, and my love for the kids in the school and my devotion to the school, and I'd have to be honest, I was devoted, which is why I'm still linked to it now. Is to continue that and to sustain that through the changes that happened, you know, that there is still an essence from what there was then, to what there is now. Some of the things like animal care, I mean I wasn't at all responsible for that, bringing that back, something that the head wanted to do but, you know, that has been restored, that was there when I started, we lost it for 30 years but it's come back. And I'm seeing some of the things,

you know, that were there before, being part and parcel of the school. And there are lots of things, I mean there are lots of things that I've really enjoyed, well particularly on the creative side which I'd very much like to see develop a bit more.

Extract 3: Hopes and concerns

What would I want to see happen? I really think that every single child, special needs or not, is an individual. And I would love to see a system where each child can feel supported and not that they go into a machine and come out. Now in special needs I think that hasn't been true at St Philip's, I think in the mainstream that's more true and that that's a worry, that it does worry me, I don't think necessarily at primary, but certainly at secondary and that worries me. I would be very concerned if special education went down that route, but I don't think it will because of the very nature of the people that are involved in it, their heart is for the young people, and for their families. And so I think, you know, that that's okay. It would concern me if the-- well funding's changing all right across the board isn't it and it would concern me if the facilities and the funds that are available to support young people didn't exist, so that would be a concern. My hopes is that every child, regardless special needs or not, achieves the potential that they can possibly achieve. That their school years are happy years, as well as being aspirational years, and they don't like me, I mean we haven't talked about my schooling but I didn't enjoy my schooling, it's amazing that I became a teacher really because I really didn't enjoy being a student at school until I got to sixth form and then I wasn't really a student, I was just sort of a person who enjoyed their social life and attended college during certain hours. But I suppose I want the very best for young people, and for kids with special needs, I think the provision is pretty good up to 16, I think in some cases after that and probably more than I am aware of, it's less good, so I am very concerned about what happens to young people as they become young adults, and then they move into middle age at whatever it is. And what opportunities and provision is there for them, and where the support systems are for them. I mean conversation I had with a parent when I went on the Special Olympics, the last competition, it made me think that, you know, here are some parents who are thinking, we are going to be looking after our young person, for the rest of our lives, but we're not going to be here forever, what happens to him then, you know, what happens when we're not there? And they are genuinely worried about that, about because there's no apparent support system that's available to him. And yet, talking with a young person, somebody again who works for--, who--, an ex-student at St Philip's who's done really reasonably well, not sure they're working, but they're certainly involved in a lot of voluntary stuff, and he's living in--, with other students, ex-students at St Philip's in--, it's not--, well it's a cared for place, but there's nobody living in, you know, support, community support sort of thing, and he's getting on really well, and he's enjoying his life, which is great, you know? Which is smashing. So it's horses for courses, but yeah, it's about levels of support for those people who need it, and then it's there, and my concern would be that that level of support, particularly once they leave school and college isn't there, and that you know, parents are required to be--, but they won't be there forever, so that would my concern.