

Reminiscences of Breakspear

Rupert Arzeian (1964-1970)

1. I have very fond and nostalgic memories of Breakspear. For six years it was a major part of my young life. A time amongst plentiful friends who had everything in common. I lived in Thornhill Road, but was not allowed to walk by the most direct route as this involved a dangerous crossing and so I would walk via Swakeleys Road.
2. On misty mornings my mum made me wear a fluorescent yellow jacket, which I found embarrassing but which was to become universal safety wear. In winter I wore the regulation school uniform navy blue raincoat. In those days, having a hood was not cool and meant getting teased, whereas now it is part of youth culture.
3. In the Infants, we would hang up our shoe-bags on our pegs, identified by pictures of animals. In class we stood to recite our times tables and had school milk at break-times. There were games outside, involving bean bags, and hoops. In the playground, boys would play with marbles and conkers or many would discuss their football teams - "We beat you on Saturday". I had no interest in football but had to invent an answer when asked frequently "who do you support?" I decided on Wolverhampton Wanderers and had a vague idea that they were somewhere in the north. Meanwhile the girls skipped, played hopscotch and did handstands and cartwheels.
4. I remember once finding a ladybird in the hedge and smuggling it back into class and keeping it my pencil box for a little while. Also the scent of this type of hedge reminds me of Breakspear to this day.
5. My friend Stephen and I would sometimes perform improvised sketches to entertain the class, having loosely formed an idea in the playground, a prospect which would terrify me now.
6. I remember surprisingly little of our classwork! It was rooted on the three R's. I would practice lists of spellings at home from a little red book.
7. We sat at wooden desks in pairs. There were inkwells and the desks had grooves at the front for our pens, and hinged lids under which we would keep our books. I still have a love of fountain pens but being left handed, developed an awkward habit of tilting the page so as not to smudge my work.
8. In the Infants, some exercise books began, after writing your name, with a box to fill in the colour of your hair and eyes. There were hard sums involving money in pounds, shillings and pence.
9. Later, every new piece of written work would begin with writing the date at the top right hand corner, and this has remained something of a habit.
10. On rainy days, breaks were spent in the classroom and were called "wet play". We could go up to the teacher's desk for drawing paper and wax crayons. I remember always choosing a dark red crayon, which I would use to draw aeroplanes on fire.
11. We wore little plimsolls for gym, which involved climbing wall bars and ropes.
12. Sometimes we played football in the nearby games fields, and there was the public humiliation of being the last to be picked for the teams.
13. At Christmas there was a nativity play. I remember my mum making my costume, including a large red glass pendant as I was one of the three wise men.
14. In summer we had a Sports Day, with events such as the egg and spoon race, the sack race, and the three legged race.

15. We sang hymns in assembly, from Hymns for Junior Schools. I still have my copy and numerous well-loved hymns still take me straight back to Breakspear, such as All things bright and beautiful; When a knight won his spurs; God is love; Hills of the north, rejoice; For all the saints; He who would valiant be; Immortal invisible God only wise; and all the Christmas carols. We would practice the hymns with Miss Parker at the piano.
16. Mr Etting the headmaster was always well groomed and very smartly dressed in a dark suit. His dark green car, a Ford Corsair I think, was always in the same spot in the car park next to the school building. On a rare occasion he visited our classroom and told us how to remember to spell "friend" by pronouncing it "Fry-end".
17. In the fourth year, my teacher was Mr Milsome. He had appeared on Blue Peter making small animals from folded silver paper.
18. I enjoyed the walks to and from school. I took to offering to carry elderly ladies' shopping bags. I also liked being asked for directions, as a chance to give advice and feel useful. I always walked home for lunch and so did not have school dinners.
19. Later we were allowed to cycle to school, if we had passed our Cycling Proficiency test.
20. Once a week we would go swimming at Highgroves in Ruislip. We learned to doggy paddle, by holding the edge of the pool while a fierce woman shouted "kick kick kick". Later there was the glory of passing the Confidence Test, for which my granddad gave me 50p.
21. We had a school trip, to Milford on Sea. I wish I had kept more pictures. It was a time when you hoped your photos would "come out" and before good photos were taken for granted. We had nice walks by the sea, an endless trudge along Chesil Beach and visited the Isle of Wight and I brought back a glass tube of coloured sand.
22. Leaving Breakspear was sad. We had a group photograph in the playground, a black and white photograph that I still treasure. There was the scrabble to fill our autograph books, probably from Arthur Bird's in Ickenham. I came across mine recently. "The cottage door is open, what a sight to see, Rupert washing nappies and Bridget making tea".
23. Afterwards, we all went our separate ways to our big schools. Our immediate fates were to be determined by our performance at the Eleven Plus exam yet I have no particular recollection of any sense of importance of the exam at the time.
24. It was a time of innocence and simplicity, long before the days of personal computers, i-pods, mobile phones or even calculators. However we now have the internet and "Friends Reunited" to thank for bringing us back together and for discovering long lost friends.
25. Happy Anniversary, Breakspear and may you long continue to make happy memories.