

Home educating...the second generation!

by Gina Bass

One of the reactions I get when I mention home education is "Home educated kids are lazy, unsociable and have no commitment to work and never achieve anything," I have the best answer ever to that. "Oh I am lazy, no commitment, never achieved anything and totally unsociable am I?" Not what they expect from a 33 yr old.

Why was I home educated?

My primary school, Drybrook County Primary, was lovely. I had a fantastic time, lots of friends, brilliant teachers who would waffle on about things totally irrelevant to the subject: people like Mr Kear with his wildlife obsession during a P.E. lesson, who treated me as an individual. It was a place where work catered to ability...

Then came secondary school. I had passed the 11+ with flying colours and won a place at the local grammar school (15 miles away), just like my sisters had done 13 years before. Unfortunately for me most of their old teachers were still there. Sadly my friends went to the then Secondary Modern. I felt alone and so small going from a country village school of 200 pupils to a school with over 1,000.

My first problem was with the P.E. teacher. I had suffered problems with my knees and legs for years; in fact I now have fibromyalgia and arthritis. She was a bully and despite notes from my G.P. to say that the only form of physical exercise I should undertake was swimming, she put me on cross country runs.

The history/ R.E teacher didn't like the fact that physio kept me out of her history classes on a Tuesday and hated it when I refused to accept the Bibles we were given during her class. In addition the abuse from class members for being top of the class and being overweight, made the whole experience unbearable. My Diaries from the time say it all:

October 1983

I have been at school one month. I hate it, the teachers hate me, the kids hate me and I hate them. I hate the journey, I hate p.e. Miss Jones forbad me from doing swimming "If you can swim, you can run" so I now have to sit in the library. I hate everything.

January 1984

Threw a 'wagger' so not to go to school. Hoping it'll snow and the school will be closed. Mrs Limming called me an idiot. I only like 1 subject (classics), shame the teacher is German and I don't understand her. Hope Mum doesn't find this as she will be disappointed. Anne and Sandra both loved it at school there, I want to run and keep running.

February 1984

Finally got asked to leave Art classes. Don't think Mr Boyd can cope with my awful drawing. Another session of "library study". I think the librarian is getting fed up with me.

Got told I had to attend handwriting classes. Don't know what the bother is, they can read my writing, must do, otherwise why do I keep getting As. Very upset because they clashed with violin lessons. Not allowed to do violin anymore. Cried in class and Mrs Alkieszewni called me a baby.

May 1984

Fed up now. Getting compared

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to my sisters is not much fun. Besides, I

want to do something with my life, not work in a village bakery until I get pregnant! Told Sandra that, the truth hurts. Hurts more when her engagement ring caught my cheek.

Had a talk with Dad today. Told him that if I had to go back in September I was going to walk out in front of a lorry 'cause I would rather die. He got a bit upset and had a row with Mum over it.

I suffered a year of this until I finally persuaded my parents to move me. I thought I would go to the secondary modern, where all my friends had gone, but I was given a private tutor, which wasn't so bad.

So, what happened ?

My private tutor was a bit of an evangelist, insisting on Bible study, which I frequently ignored. Otherwise we did our own thing and I managed to get a O-level grade C in Latin at 14. She then inconveniently up and died. So, between the ages of 14 and 15½, I was left to my own devices.

Did I go out thieving and causing trouble? No. I stayed at home and read, and read and read until I had worked my way through Shakespeare, Dickens, Austen, Miss Reads, Agatha Christie and countless other authors I found on my parents' shelves.

I also helped my father with the gardening, looking after and breeding chickens, ducks, peacocks and pheasants. I helped him work on the car, build things out of wood, spot weld, build a stone fireplace. I learnt to cook on a solid fuel Rayburn (which is an art form and very handy as I now have one of my own). I found out about eating from the wild, how to shoot rabbits, how to paint, wallpaper and lay concrete. I don't think my father realised that he was giving me a far better education than any institution. All this while waiting for the LEA to provide a psychological examination to see whether I should have a home tutor.

My tutor was provided by the LEA, for just 6 months to study for GCSE's. I took the exams it was humiliating and degrading, but I did okay, 4 E's and a D. Not fantastic but not bad for doing in 6 months what others had taken 2 years to prepare for. Personally I would rather have been helping my dad build the coal shed and clean out the chickens.

After I had finished I had to go to work. The problem being that being home educated in the 1980's left me with a handicap. I was informed at one interview that "Not having a traditional educational background would lead to problems". That left me with the dreaded YTS scheme in retail. I did that for a year and moved from shop to shop until I became a shop manager. Then on a whim I gave it all up to work in the music industry, managing bands and general roadie work.

Did I really do nothing with my life? Am I a waster? I think I have done far more with my life than those who spent years at university just to get a dead end job. How many of them rubbed shoulders with Ozzy Osbourne, Prince, The Prodigy, Screaming Lord Sutch and the like? How many have met Royalty, written articles for magazines (both online and off) and campaigned to get laws changed and still been able to sit down and think? Not many I should imagine will be as content with life as I am at this moment.

And onwards... (Or what Gina did next!)

I went to Africa, came back, got married, had my own children and sent the eldest to school... oops!

When my eldest was in reception at a school in Eastbourne, we had huge problems with her teacher and the neighbours from hell whose own "darlings" went to the same school. After an accumulation of events, we withdrew her and began teaching her at home, and going to home education meetings etc until we moved to Devon.

When we moved we thought we would try school again. Year 1 was a great success with a caring teacher who reminded me of Miss Honey from the Roald Dahl book *Matilda* and things were good. Then came Year 2. and a teacher more like Miss Trunchball. She began to pick on daughter, as did some of her classmates. I could see history beginning to repeat itself; it was time to nip it in the bud, before it got unbearable for her, just like it had for me.

Leilani is now a "second generation" home educated child. Whether she will go to secondary school depends on many factors. She is pushing me to take an English GCSE, I think that at 8 she is a bit young so have advised her to wait a year or two.

She is bright, artistic and knows what she wants to do. I will find a suitable school for her at 11 if that is really what she wants. Otherwise we will carry on the way we are.

So two generations of home education in our family and Leilani has vowed never to send any of her future children to school. Who knows, in 25 years time maybe she will be writing an article on home educating the third generation.