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## **Title :**

*Survivors from the Special School System*

## **Abstract :**

*This paper is the result of several interviews conducted with people who have experienced the special school system. The voices provide valuable testament to the need of urgent change.*

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## *Survivors from the Special School System*

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am so grateful that Lorraine, Richard, Mumtaz and Howard felt able to share their memories of their time at "special" school for this Reader. No system of segregation which causes such a sense of alienation from family and society can be allowed to continue, and the struggle for truly Inclusive Education for disabled and non disabled children is a key arena of the struggle which disabled people have engaged in for our true participation in mainstream society.

A recent study of special schools, carried out by the Alliance for Inclusive Education, and covering 8,252 children, revealed that only two had achieved five or more HCSE's at A to C level - the benchmark for entry into further education. Out of 85 special schools in the study, 49 had not entered any public examinations. Certainly, in recent years I have talked to young survivors of the special school system, and none have indicated that change has occurred since I, or any of the people contributing to this Reader, left school.

Increasingly, disabled people are becoming involved in mainstream debate, alongside our non-disabled allies, but the appalling and complicated issues peculiar to education at all levels show more clearly than perhaps other debates the need for mutual agreement and support in the struggle to give all children an education which facilitates them reaching their own full potential.

Many thanks to Karen Barton for transcribing the tapes for editing, and for her enormous support in getting the edited Reader to the printers.

And many thanks to Colin Barnes for writing the Introduction to this Reader, at short notice and over the Christmas break.

Anne Rae,

Macclesfield, January 1997.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Segregated special education and its effects.**

As has been said many times before segregating children with perceived impairments - whether physical, sensory or intellectual - into segregated "special" school environments is one of the major barriers to the successful abolition of discrimination against disabled people in contemporary British society. Yet, despite consistent opposition from disabled people and their organisations, the special education system seems set to survive and flourish.

In my view this is disastrous. Besides perpetuating the age old myths and ignorance surrounding both impairment and disability, the special school system consistently fails to provide disabled school leavers with the skills and confidence necessary for adulthood in a world increasingly geared towards the needs of a mythical non-disabled majority.

All too often the process of special education results in a sense of extreme social isolation and immaturity. This, in turn, can lead to an apparent passive acceptance of a lifestyle characterised by poverty and an overt and unnecessary dependence on others. This, of course, is the very opposite of what the special school system is supposed to achieve. Moreover, the damage done to an individual's self esteem by this "special" provision is something which I firmly believe can never be fully overcome. It is clear, therefore, that if discrimination against disabled people is to be eliminated, then the special education system must be eliminated too.

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His many publications include:

*Exploring the Divide: Illness and Disability* (1996)  
(with MERCER, G.) Leeds, The Disability Press.

*Disabling Imagery in the Media: An Exploration of Cultural Representations of Disabled People.* (1992) Belper, British Council of Organisations of Disabled People in association with Ryburn Press.

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*Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination: A Case for Anti-Discrimination Legislation* (1991) London, C. Hurst and Co. Ltd in association with the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People.

*Equal Rights and Disabled People* (1991) (with BYNOE, I. and OLIVER, M.) London, Institute of Public Policy Research.

*Cabbage Syndrome: The Social Construction of Dependence*, (1990) Lewes, Falmer Press.

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### ***INTERVIEW WITH LORRAINE GRADWELL***

**How old were you when you left home? Do you know what your feelings were about going away from home?**

I was eight and a half when I went to residential school, I don't know what my feelings were. It was explained to me as a kind of prefixed thing - there would be lots of other children the same as me ie. disabled children to play with and there would be lots more chances for getting out and about which I didn't have at home. It was seen as a jolly kind of wheeze really, that was my memory of it. It was made to sound very attractive and I was very keen to go.

My parents were less keen for me to go, or so they tell me, I don't recall it at the time. I also know that my home tutor didn't want me to go either.

In terms of my being away from home I guess I didn't have very much imagination. I wasn't worried about it at all because it was described as being so good, so much fun and enjoyable, so much more than I could possibly get at home.

**Who put it to you and your parents that you should go?**

I can't remember. I know from discussions with my parents that there were professionals, whoever professionals were, - I couldn't say who they were. But they were the kind that made my parents feel that if they didn't let me go away to school that they would be doing me a great disservice. They said that I would have access to more physio and specialised treatment, which wasn't really true in the end.

**Do you remember your first impression of the school and how you felt when you got there?**

I remember it being not a comfortable place, obviously it was much bigger than I'd been used to - it was like one of those Elizabethan buildings, it had stone floors, wooden panelling and chintzy curtains and things like that, it seemed very formal.

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I think I probably seemed quite reserved, even spoilt, to the other children -(the school took about 80 children between the ages 5-15) I didn't think that I was better than them, I don't think I ever thought that, but I certainly had some difficulty relating to some of them... I'm not really sure why - I think it was difficult to fit into a larger group of children. I'd never had to do that before. I found it difficult, and I made a mess of it.

### **Was it a single sex school?**

No, it was mixed.

### **What were your thoughts about the staff?**

Looking back to when I very first started - for the first year or so I remember very little about the staff. I don't remember anyone being particularly kind or being particularly unkind. I really do feel that the staff were quite a non-event. There were local women who came in who were called nurses. They were just there to look after you. One in particular seemed to take a kind of a shine to me but it didn't demonstrate itself in kindness or anything like that, I mean it surprises me when I look back. She used to tell me what nice eyes I had, and what nice hair I had and things like that. Looking back it makes me feel a little uneasy really. Because I can remember this occurring in the bathroom. There were other members of staff who made innuendoes about you and about your body and so on. In particular there used to be a pool there, a therapy pool, it had recently been built and wasn't there when I first started. I used to love going to the pool, I used to like swimming. We sometimes had one of the male nurses, as they were called, who used to help you, we didn't have a choice in this. There were two cubicles but if you couldn't walk then you had to use a table with some screens around it, this male nurse liked to refer to your breast as dumplings, and make personal comments. You didn't really like to be on your own with them. There was never anything more that I can specifically recall, but I know the other children used to make comments, including the boys, about this particular sort of thing.

### **What about the curriculum, what did it include, did you find it interesting - did it stretch you, or was it just comprehensive?**

I think it had a quite wide curriculum, although I know that my parents had to fight to get the school to put me in for the eleven plus exam. The school maintained that I would get the same

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education regardless but my mother said *"but what if she leaves the school and goes to a mainstream school and she hasn't done the eleven plus. It could direct her in a particular route"*, which was the Grammar school at that time. There was a quite a fight for that and I did sit the eleven plus, myself and two other girls who did it at the same time. It was in two parts and the other two failed part one but I passed it and can remember doing part two.

There was a lot of bullying went on at the school while I was there. The two girls who had failed the exam were two of the protagonists so that didn't put me in a good position really. I did the eleven plus and passed it. There was a "grammar school class" that was attended by pupils that were three or four years older than me - there were five of them and they were treated as a class - that were grammar school pupils if you like. We, myself and a boy of my age who had passed the eleven plus had to work through a lot of things on our own. Basically we sat in on a non-grammar class and we didn't even sit together, we really didn't want to, but were given work to work through mostly on our own and we had French lessons, with a teacher so it was a kind of a mixture really. I never had any history lessons because that clashed with my therapy sessions. So I never had history all the time I was there. It was a curious kind of mismatch ...it didn't make proper provision.

They had offered to send me to another school, I think it was on the Isle of Wight, to a grammar school... well that was what I was told. I can't recall there being such a school but I knew it was a long, long way away from home. It was for disabled girls but my parents didn't want me to go so far away from home...but there was the fact that I and others there needed a grammar school education. In fact it did set us apart from our classmates...I now think, academically it would have been better for me to go to a grammar school. Although I didn't know it at the time. There are benefits for girls in a single sex school. In a way the distance from home was almost immaterial because my parents had no transport and they had to come on the bus.

### **Did you have set visiting days?**

Yes we did.

### **Was that every weekend or once a month?**

Yes they could come every weekend, well I mean the school allowed it but my parents couldn't do it. I used to see each of my parents once a month.

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**What about recreational time - leisure time? What activities were you allowed to participate in or encouraged to do, there is a difference.**

Yes, there is a difference, I mean on the one hand we were allowed a lot of free time and a lot of autonomy. The school had quite large grounds. We were allowed quite a lot of freedom to be out in the grounds, you know within the time of getting back for bedtime and so on. There were also out of school activities. There was quite a lot when I think about it. I didn't necessarily go to all of them. There were things for the younger children. There were "singing games" that I could remember they used to play " Old MacDonald Had a Farm" and things like that and there was the Recorder Group. The school had a pony that some children got to ride, the pony was called Midnight, I only rode it once and could hardly stay on it. There were guides, brownies, scouts and cubs and some sporting things.

A lot of people were left to their own devices, none of it was compulsory and I suppose I was encouraged towards certain things, but I wasn't aware of it.

**Could you go out from the school?**

Only on a Sunday afternoon and only, I think, if you were eleven.

**Would that be unsupervised or supervised?**

That was unsupervised but only in certain situations. I can't remember what the criteria was. Some people were allowed to go into the nearest town, but there wasn't any transport. It was that kind of a village it wasn't geared up for disabled people. They weren't geared up for an impairment based school where there were children with quite severe impairments. The fact that there wasn't any transport available certainly limited your mobility. You could only get by if you could walk, push yourself or get someone to push you.

**As the years passed did you have any conscious thoughts about the school that were critical. If so what were the issues for you then? Was it other people's thought's and did you ever wonder why you were there?**

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I thought I knew quite clearly why I was there. It was because I said I wanted to go. That was always at the back of my mind even when at one time I really did hate it.

### **Why did you hate it?**

Well because there was quite severe bullying going on, and I was the target for quite a lot of that bullying. I got called "Professor" because I was seen to be cleverer than a lot of the other children. There was a time that the "top" of the hierarchy was two or three, definitely the two girls that had taken the exam at the same time as me. There definitely developed a gang kind of structure and if they said you were out, you were, and I was always on the periphery. If you were in it was with the skin of your teeth and a lot of manoeuvring. There seemed to be no other way than to accept it, I'm talking about physical bullying at times. I was very unhappy there for a long time really, I was there for 4.5 years in all and most of my memories are about being unhappy and wishing I didn't have to be there, but also thinking that because I had expressed such a desire to go I couldn't turn round and say I didn't like it, I never considered that to be an option.

It was interesting that an old girl contacted me about a year ago and we were talking about the bullying that went on. She actually slept in the next bed to me for a while. She said that after I left the bullying was addressed and it got sorted out, which made the people there much happier. It surprised me that she had acknowledged the bullying because we had never even talked about it when I was there.

### **Have you ever been able to keep in contact to the people you were with?**

Only by default. As I say there was this girl who actively sought me out. She did quite a good bit of detective work and got my parents' address and phone number and traced me. The only other person that I know of that went to my school was Richard Wood who, as I recall, was in the grammar school class. We were in the same Recorder Class, but we had no real contact.

### **Do you think that not making or keeping friendships was peculiar to the nature of the school?**

I think partly it is because it is a residential school. Children came from such a wide geographical area. The school was in the depths of North Yorkshire and people must have come from a catchment of 50 to 70 miles in all directions. So when you went home for the holidays you never

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saw any of the other pupils until you came back to school, you just didn't do it - you were not in contact at all.

**That is interesting because a lot of non-disabled children who have been to boarding school do seem to keep in touch.**

It is interesting, I'm not sure why that is. Maybe it's something to do with the reasons why disabled children have been to boarding school. It's not necessarily seen as a positive choice that may have been for enhancing the children, and we were such a varied bunch...because we were not there for academic reasons, which is why many non-disabled children go to boarding school.

**While you were at school do you think it affected your relationships at home?**

I'm sure it did. I've often thought what it must have been like for my family - not to have had me there for most of the time and then I'm there for six weeks in the summer for example. It probably upset the routine for my two brothers, and my parents would have had to adapt their lives whilst I was there. I used to have an ambulance to take me home from school. Once I was at home, unless my parents took me out, I was there full stop. I think it's got to be rather a strange relationship, your time is special almost. It certainly was for me. Although I'm not saying it was the same for everyone - but you don't have the same day-to-day, easy-going, come and go relationships, which I would imagine would be the norm for the majority of families.

I was very happy when I was at home and very unhappy when I had to go back to school, although I tried not to let my parents see that. I never asked them about it so I don't know if I was successful in that.

I always got on really well with my eldest bother even when we had, and still do, these long periods apart. I never got on with my younger brother, I don't know why or whether that had anything to do with being away a lot. You become like a part time member of the family. It must have been very, very difficult for my parents I would imagine, who were always glad to see me home.

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### **Did it affect your contact with the other children in your vicinity?**

I didn't have any contact. There was one little girl who sometimes came to play. I think that was because her mum knew mine and it was a bit of a duty for her. We played together but, I couldn't really understand why she was coming. Strictly speaking though I didn't have any contact.

### **Did you think it was a mixture because you weren't very mobile while at home or did you think it was more one thing or the other?**

I think it was a mixture, for nine months of the year I didn't live there so you can't make a lasting relationship in that kind of scenario. When I did go home I only ever went out with my parents, there was no chance really.

### **How old were you when you left that school?**

I left school and went into hospital to have some surgery on my spine. I was a couple of weeks away from being thirteen. I didn't know how long I was going to be in hospital, which actually became two and half years, and I didn't know if I was going to go back to the school, so I didn't "leave" as such. There were never any good-byes or anything like that because it was understood that I would eventually go back. Strictly speaking when I left the school I was almost 13, then I spent two and a half years in hospital having major surgery to straighten my spine.

The hospital had schooling, there were two children's wards and 3 teachers because a lot of the children there were receiving orthopaedic treatment, which meant major operations and a long time in treatment. It felt like a form of residential schooling in a way except that I was very happy there, strangely enough. I was on a mixed ward, which was like a secondary school because most of the children were 9,10 to about 15, I spent nearly three years there. I had a very good teacher, although I didn't realise it at the time.

She thought a lot of me, I can see looking back, and indeed we corresponded until she died, which was 6 or 7 years ago.

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Even though I didn't keep in touch with them afterwards I had some quite close friendships in the hospital in those years and it didn't really matter that you used a wheelchair, it was seen as a "normal" situation and part of being in hospital.

There was a male nurse in charge of the ward who was very free and easy and he didn't put many restrictions on how to behave. I felt very settled there, not unhappy as I was at school. I think because of that when the time came for me to be discharged I didn't want to go back to school and I felt able to say so.

### **What did happen then?**

I went home and went to the local mainstream grammar school. My family were Catholic so in a way that helped. I know that from talking to my mum, she had several battles to get me a place at this grammar school because without my academic ability there were doubts about the wisdom of putting me into mainstream education. This resulted in the headmistress coming to hospital to give me an interview. I can see her now, walking up the ward, she was a nun, in full habit and she glided up the ward. I wasn't put off or overwhelmed by her at all. It said a lot for the type of schooling I was getting. She asked about what kind of books I was reading. I also had vivid thoughts that what my mum had said about me taking the eleven plus, had come true, and yes, I was accepted into mainstream school at 15.5. I started school in January and did my 'O' levels in the early June. I didn't do as many as the other girls I only did 5, but I did them in five months. I think that says something about the quality of the teaching that I'd had, because for French, Maths and English there was just one teacher and I didn't seem to struggle with them at all. What they did at school was arrange all my classes to be on the ground floor, the only classroom I couldn't get to was the language class which was up the stairs. Although the school was split level it only had four steps halfway through the school. It didn't seem to matter because any four girls that were around at the time each got hold of the four corners of my wheelchair.

**So you left residential school to go into mainstream school, how did that feel - after all while you were at residential school and in hospital you were part of the system which was geared to meet your needs and were physically designed to make you feel part of that particular building and people. So how did it feel to be totally unprotected?**

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There are two ways of looking at it. Whether or not I was in a physically hostile environment, and looking back at it I was, it didn't feel like that at the time. I used to get taxi's to school and back. I was great friends with all the school taxi drivers who did all the school runs. To the extent that I knew all the schools and taxi drivers so well that, if ever there was a new driver they would say "go and pick Lorraine up and tell her you're doing such and such a run and she'll tell you what to do".

As I said there were four steps part-way through the school and that was a problem, but that was par for the course really, and I just had to have four girls that were around and they would get one on each corner and lift me up and down the steps. So in terms of physical access to the school this didn't feel too bad really. Even though I felt the odd one out really, in many ways. It was a single sex school, all girls, Catholic Grammar School with several nuns on the teaching staff, quite a traditional Catholic Grammar School and I'd gone straight into the fifth year. The other pupils that had been there for three or four years had established their friendships, their presence and established their paths. I started in January and on the last day of the previous term, the headteacher had given them all a talk about a "special pupil" who was going to be coming in January. She revealed nothing about who I was and why I was so "special". I found this out about a year later. They had all been speculating who this was going to be -a foreign princess or something - and they got me.

I actually fell into quite a supportive group and there were four or five girls I spent quite a lot of time with at school and that was OK Although there were a couple of situations that were not. Although outside the school for most of the time it was like being back at boarding school. Once the taxi took me home that was were I stayed. I had no dealing with transport at all, just a three wheel invalid car but that was when I left the school and went to College. One of the things that really gave me difficulty was that I had formed quite a close friendship with a girl who lived quite close to me. She would come round in the school holidays sometimes, I was well aware that she went to see other people as well and they all went out together. I don't think she was being kind to me.... I think a genuine friendship developed, it was very specific. We had a school trip to France. We went to Paris and stayed in a school there during the holidays. There was no particularly specific arrangements made to accommodate my needs. We had to get on and off the coaches and I had to negotiate the steps the best way I could. The way the accommodation was laid out, as I remember, was a central teaching block and different houses around that the girls stayed in. Myself and this girl stayed in a ground floor room in one of the houses in the circle. There weren't many ground floor rooms well not bedrooms anyway. There were 3 or 4 steps up to each of these blocks,

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even the teaching block. I found out sometime afterwards, when there was a prospect of another trip abroad, that although this girl had never said anything, she had actually found it very difficult. She felt she had been focused as being my major support and was not very happy with the situation. I didn't know anything about it at the time and I felt betrayed when I eventually found out.

The chance came for another trip, and she said she couldn't do it again. I was quite devastated by that.

**Perhaps that says a lot about the inequality of the friendship, and how difficult it is to develop an equal friendship with non-disabled people?**

Yes - at the time I was very aware that there were other venues that the girls would go out to and I wasn't invited... mind you I never put myself forward for it. Most places were inaccessible, and I knew that I would have to rely on other people to help me out.

**What do you think the legacy of all this was for you? What kinds of effect did it have on you?**

I think there are quite a lot of effects from these times of the past, and I don't mean just the residential school. Up until I got married at 25 I had never spent more than 4 years in any one setting. I think the long term effect of that is you're not really sure if you've got any roots, even at home. It was home, but it wasn't the same as having lived there for 25 years. The time I've spent in Manchester, where I live now, is the longest I've spent in any one place. I think another thing was because I was so unhappy at boarding school, it left me with a high level of self-sufficiency, or insularity, really and I can be quite selfish in the true sense of the word, that I am very self-aware. I think you develop reserves of self-sufficiency that you draw on in situations like that, especially in such a young child, and you haven't got your mum or dad around. The difficulty of not talking about things, you've no-one watching out for you... one of the long term effects is I am still quite self sufficient, to the point that I probably appear stand offish to some people. I don't think I'm as bad as I used to be, but I have to do some work on it sometimes, ...I am aware that it's there! It's an issue of stress really, and its a shame it had to develop.

I don't think academically the system's really fair, it is reflected in the choices that have been made along the way. I really should have been able to go to University and do something more academic but they never offered me the choice when I was at school - no-one ever suggested I should do

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another year or something like that. Again it happened that I never had a history lesson really. The only time I did any history was in mainstream school, I never did it at boarding school or in hospital. I think that academically I could have been more well rounded.

I think that's another part of the legacy that the boarding school resisted my mums attempts to get me a good academic education, but then I think looking back it must have been very difficult for her. Because she was a bit defiant, at least I had a standard school education because of this.

I think we mentioned before long term relationships with school friends. I don't have any and maybe a pattern has now been established. I don't have any from boarding school and I don't have any from the 3.5 years I was in hospital. Which I could reasonably be expected to have, particularly with other people who had spent long periods in there as well. I don't have any from the time in college either, I think that must be a pattern.

**Do you think it's the short time you spent in each environment you were in, or do you think its specifically disability related?**

Its probably a bit of both in actual fact. I do think there's a pattern there - that there are distinct areas of my life that bear little relationship to each other. In different contexts there were very different people involved, so I think there's that factor. Some of those areas are with disabled children who didn't have very similar impairments to myself, certainly at boarding school. Some of the children were only incontinent, for example, but they had still been sent away to boarding school.

There was also a lot of bullying, people thought that it wouldn't happen, particularly at the school I was at, but they had dreadful bullies. I think some of it's to do with impairment in this business of unequal relationships from when I was at school. In fact there were one or two girls, although I didn't realise it at the time, that I could have developed a relationship with, but I also think that I didn't necessarily develop the skills to facilitate that. Again partly because of this pattern and expectations.

**What do you think the issues are now for segregated schools for disabled people? I know I've been asking questions that are not very directive but I think this is, what do you think.**

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This is the question that I'm going to find harder, it certainly seems to be harder to answer.

Apart from saying things are the same as they ever were, obviously about being sent away from home; not being a part of a family, the fact that the majority will not be known for their academic excellence in choice of school. I think there's probably something about the kind of impairments that children have, I think that the nature of the impairments seems to be different these days. When I was at school polio was a very common thing, there were more children around that had polio. It was seen as a physical dilemma, it didn't necessarily affect your academic ability. Today there is an issue about children who go to, or are sent to residential schools, having a more severe level of impairment and more multiple impairments because of the changes in medical developments. They can keep children with very severe impairments alive, and can facilitate the development of the child who needs much more sophisticated support than we did as disabled children. The fact is that polio is largely eradicated, but that was one of the major childhood causes of impairment at that time. I think it's becoming more "specialised" than when I was at school. We had an awful lot of freedom looking back on it, well much more freedom than I had when I was at home, but that's a state of paradox, when people supplied me with a wheelchair. I didn't even have a wheelchair when I first went to the school, so I think its become more of a specialism than it was in segregated education because of what is possibly seen as the great need for children who are in segregated education to have "specialist" support. So it's possibly much harder for parents to resist.

Thinking about it, looking back, if the right person had made the points to my parents I could easily have gone to the same school as my brothers. The same could be said for a lot of the children who were at the same school as me, who would not have been sent to segregated schools if the physical nature of the local establishments had been a little bit different.

It explains itself, that professionals then justified segregated education more than they could have done if we were to examine it then as we would now. It perhaps would be easier today, to justify segregated education to parents despite the advances of the disabled people's movement. Quite sad really when you think about it.

**Do you think that's a strong enough case to struggle to get segregated schools to close?**

On its own I don't think it does, I think it is a strong enough case, but that's different from making a strong enough case.

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I think and know that there are a lot of boarding schools that are "good" for academic reasons. I just think that the message being sent to disabled children themselves, and to the families is not a good message to send. If the best we, as a society, can do for our disabled children is still to separate them from their families and communities, then I don't think we've advanced very far in the 30 years since I left segregated education.

### *Brief Biography : December 1996*

After gaining 3 "A" levels at school Lorraine went on to do a course in Fashion Design & Technology and then worked in the clothing industry for several years. After a brief spell as a civil servant in a job centre Lorraine had a "career break" of eight years whilst her children were young, returning to work as a development worker with the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People - having been involved as a volunteer in setting up the organisation.

Moving on from GMCDP, having become the Team Leader, Lorraine spent 3 years setting up a health project based within Manchester City council and is now working for the same employer, establishing a training, employment and independent living initiative. Continuing to be active in the disabled people's movement, Lorraine is the Chair of GMCDP.

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**INTERVIEW WITH MUMTAZ CHANCHWELIA**

**How old were you when you went to a segregated school?**

I was five years old.

**Was that a boarding school or was it a day school?**

It was a day school.

**Did anyone ever talk to you about going there, can you remember that far back? Did anyone ask how you felt about it, or explain to you why you were going there?**

Partly, I can actually remember this lady coming to our house and just saying that you will be going to this school. Not really about feelings and stuff like that, she just took us to this school to have a look on the first day, and that was it basically.

**Have you got any memories of how you felt at that time?**

It was all very strange really. It was only a small room. (The classroom)

**When you went there did you feel welcome?**

Yes. The teachers did welcome me - yes.

**You remember feeling quite welcome do you?**

Yes

**What about the other children there? Did you make friends or was that difficult?**

On the first day I went I didn't have any friends at all. Well - to tell the truth I think I was the only Asian person in the class, I don't think there was anyone else. The number in the class wasn't a big

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class I think there was at least eight children. It wasn't a big class. I can remember not any on the table I sat with, there was this girl but she wasn't so friendly. I guess I did make friends obviously afterwards but in the early days it was difficult. It was all very strange.

**What kinds of things did you do at that school? Obviously with you being five it would have been the usual kind of paint and paper tasks? But when you got older did you actually receive proper schooling?**

No. We all have reading books obviously, and we all read books. I can remember I had a maths book as well.

**Did they actually teach you, did they teach you?**

I don't remember.

**You don't remember?**

I think when it came to the reading we all had our turns to do our reading, how far we got to. I guess that was teaching in a way.

**When you got to the age of about eleven did things change, can you remember any changes?**

Apparently this school that I went to, I went to Oaklands school that was first and that apparently in 1983 it was closed down obviously so we had to move to another school. This was Parklands school in Swinton we went to. When we moved I was eight years old

**Was it very different to the school you had already been to?**

Yes, there were a lot more pupils in the class.

**Was it still a special school?**

Yes it was still a special school.

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**How did that change affect you? Can you remember, how did you feel about the change? Did you like it or?**

It felt I had to start getting to know people and making friends again, it felt strange basically. I know that from my last school I did make friends eventually and they didn't come to the school so I had to start again. You know - find your way around the school again, It's another big unit isn't it?

**What about education at that time, did you feel that that had changed? As well as the fact that you had moved, do you think you knew what was expected of you, do you think you were being taught properly?**

I think what I was learning did increase on the subjects that we had. We did get quite a lot of help from the nursery nurses and we could ask question to them and stuff like that. But having learning difficulties basically maybe I was a bit slow.

**What kind of things did you actually do while you were at school?**

The subjects, well obviously we had Maths and English, we even had lessons in handwriting skills. We also had art and that was painting and stuff we even had a bit of gardening as well at times.

**How did you feel about being at a special school? Did you wish you were in a school were all the other children went?**

Yes, you feel you'd like to be like brothers and sisters that went to the same school and their teachers at school they talk about them. When they talk about when they went to school and how it was there and you talk about your school - it's very different. You can tell the difference obviously because both schools aren't the same.

**Did that make you feel a different to other children?**

Yes, because I'm going to a different school, I'm a different person to them.

**Do you think it had any effect on who you were friends with outside of school? Do you think it made it more difficult for you to make friends like other children?**

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Yes - because my brothers and sisters friends lived nearby basically and most of my friends were out of town basically. So it was difficult. I am still struggling now, at the moment I don't have friends who live locally they are always at other towns.

**Does that mean that you haven't been able to keep in touch with your friends you had at school. You've lost some great friends have you?**

Yes.

**How do you feel about that?**

It's something you have to get used to really when you leave school. You say bye and that's it really, isn't it? I know with some of the friends there, very occasionally we get in touch rarely. We say we'll write to each other but we tend to leave it don't we?

**Well now that you've grown up do you ever think about what a difference it might have made to you if you had been in a different school? In an ordinary school, do you regret it, regret the fact that you went to a special school?**

No I don't regret, I don't think I really had the choice by being a disabled person. At that time to go to a normal school like their brothers and sisters I don't think I really had that option. Maybe now, they try to deal with it different. They might have more of an option these days. In those days it was a special school you were going to and that's were you went.

**If there had of been a choice, would you have liked to go to a mainstream school?**

Yes, because it's so near to your home isn't it, and I had to get up early in the morning and travel. Also it would have been a different experience being normal (school) I think.

**How did you feel when you left school? I went to a special school and when I left I didn't realise that I was disabled until I left that school and starting to live in the outside world. How did you feel when you actually left that school? Did you feel glad to leave or did you feel a bit scared?**

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I was glad that I was leaving school, because I never liked school really. I remember thinking - as soon as I leave school that I was going to be stuck at home really. Not going to be in touch with my friends, that we're going to lose touch really, and stuff like that.

**When you were at school did you ever think teaching staff taught you as if you would go to work when you left school? Did people speak to you about what you would do when you left school?**

No.

**Did anyone ever come to school to talk to you about what any of you would do when you left school?**

Yes, at the age of sixteen people came.

**What kind of things did they say to you, can you remember?**

What you would like to do now, whether you were going to college, or what you can expect now basically.

**Did you find that helpful?**

Very, yes.

**Question Did you actually go to Further Education?**

Yes, I went to college.

**Did you? How did you feel about that, did you enjoy it?**

Well it was an experiencing time basically. There were good points about it as well as bad. The classes were very big compared to what I was used to. I was the only disabled person in that class. It was very strange and I thought I wouldn't be able to cope with the work load.

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**Were people quite supportive?**

Yes they were very supportive. I was lucky I did make friends and they were quite helpful actually, yes. Without them I would have struggled.

**Did you think that going to special school made you more confident or less confident than if you had gone to an ordinary school?**

It's a difficult question that.

**You're pretty confident anyway aren't you? You're a very calm person.**

I don't know the answer to that.

**Before we end this interview is there anything you feel yourself about what happened to you as a young woman around education, do you wish it had been different?**

As a woman, I think sex education would have been. We didn't talk about it.

**You think sex education. Do you think you should have had it?**

Yes, we're just normal people aren't we? I think it would have been embarrassing if boys and girls were mixed in those lessons if we had them. You didn't get much of it.

**Do you think that was because you were disabled and nobody expected you to be sexual beings?**

In a way that did come into it, they don't treat you as normal people do they? I guess they just don't think.

**What else would you have liked to have had different? Do you think that your school prepared you for a life outside of school?**

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Not really. I think they think they are helping you basically, I think they really think they are helping you, but I'm sure they could do better in helping each individual person. Personally I think they have not tried hard enough. I think they could help you out more if they tried.

#### *Brief Biography : December 1996*

Mumtaz now lives at home with her family, and sometimes helps out in her mothers' shop. She also attends the Young Disabled People's Project run by the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People, as well as being involved with "Young and Free" - a young Black people's organisation based in Manchester.

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### ***INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD FAULKNER.***

**Howard, did you go to residential school?**

Yes, I went to a physically handicapped school that was residential and non-residential and I was non-residential.

**How old were you when you went?**

I was 12.

**Did that mean you went to a different school before you went there? Did you go to a primary school?**

Yes, I went to a primary school for 4 years, and then I passed my 11 plus. After I passed, it made me eligible to go to a Grammar school. I went to a grammar school for a year, which was a mainstream school, it was a dreadful experience, so I finished up going to a special school.

**What was the problem there you had?**

I didn't fit in.

**How was that, how didn't you fit in?**

Well, I just wasn't accepted by quite a few members of staff, and other people.

**So how was the decision made for you to go to a special school, a segregated school?**

Well - I was really given the option, I wasn't forced to comply. Someone, when it became apparent that I wanted to leave the grammar school, gave me the option of going to a couple of special schools, one which was Winsford and the other was Margaret Barclay at Knutsford. So I choose the one at Winsford and I went there.

**Do you remember your first impressions of going there? Do you hate yourself?**

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Yes, I thought "what have I let myself in for.?"

### **Really, why?**

It was a totally different environment to what I was used to from when I used to go to a quote "normal" school. It was a lot more institutionalised in the sense that it was built around disability rather than academic purposes. I'm not saying that it wasn't academic, but there was a lot of emphasis on the fact that the people there were disabled. So it was a lot different.

### **How did you feel about it?**

A bit apprehensive.

### **Were you disappointed that things had turned out as they did at grammar school?**

I was really, yes, because I didn't really fit in to the special school I subsequently went to, I was still attached to the disabled school, but I went to do some lessons later on at the comprehensive, which was next door. I had a tendency to feel that the staff at the special school took over. In considering everything to be their business rather than of me and my family. So I think from that extent it was a mistake.

### **What? Not to have kept on at grammar school?**

Not necessarily not to have kept on at grammar school; I don't think I could have stuck being at grammar school much longer than I did. I mean, you see all kinds of things with hindsight. Maybe if I'd been a bit more insistent on being transferred to a normal school... if you can call it a normal school - I hate that word.

### **Mainstream?**

Yes - a mainstream school, perhaps I would have been a lot happier than I was. I'm not suggesting that I was that unhappy at special school, but it certainly wasn't an ideal solution in hindsight.

### **What do you think could have been different?**

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From what point of view?

**Perhaps from the point of view of staying at grammar school or going to another mainstream school? What do you think the problems were at grammar school?**

I think a lot of it was that quite a number of staff couldn't accept that I was disabled. One or two of them accused me, well, not directly to my face, but said at parents evening to my parents', complained that I "was deliberately being late for lessons because I was disabled"

**What - that you were playing on it?**

Yes. I got the impression at a very early stage that they'd accepted me there under sufferance. They didn't really want me there.

**What was the access like to the school, was it difficult?**

The grammar school?

Yes...

Well there was a lift. It was large, what I can remember, but there was a lift in the premises but unfortunately there were times, like lifts do, they break down, and this one had its moments. When the lift broke down I had to use the stairs and this had been one of the instances where I had been a little bit late, which one instance where they actually accused me of being fake. Which I thought was a bit unfair.

**How did you handle your relationship with the other pupils and your schoolmates, did you find that difficult?**

Some good, some terrible. One in particular.

**What was the worst kind of thing you had to deal with?**

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The worst one to deal with was the pretty awful things they said to me. Not physical things, but certainly things that I'd never been, at that time, never been able to or never actually had to deal with. Such as "You're spastic" and things like that and I'd never come across anyone who had treated me like that before. I'd been to mainstream education all my life, prior to the time I did in the Winsford school. I'd certainly always been accepted but this particular year that I had, just knocked me back. Made me a bit disillusioned and perhaps in hindsight if I had stuck it out it could have been different, but I had just taken enough.

**Looking back, have you come to any conclusions as to why there was a difference between the primary school and the way you were treated there, which was obviously good, and how you were treated at the grammar school? Have you got any views about the difference?**

Well, I had a very good headmaster at the primary school who was always very good. I don't know... perhaps it was just how things were in those days, about 21 years ago. I think maybe it was just the attitudes of people... it's very difficult to say.

**When you went to the segregated school, did you find any great difference between what you'd been used to and the level of academic achievement that you'd been expected to reach at grammar school? Where you expected to have that level of achievement at segregated school?**

No, I think initially when I first went there that the level of expectancy was certainly a lot lower. When I first joined there was no mainstream examinations, CSE's or GCE's as they were then. They didn't start introducing those for a couple of years after I joined, in the meantime I had started taking the subjects at the comprehensive, which was like I said, was just next door. Yes, I would say it was lower, it certainly was lower, and there certainly wasn't the variety of subjects that we had at grammar school. Sciences and stuff like that, were I would say, primitive in comparison. The teachers certainly didn't have the expertise on that programme.

**What do you think the effect of that was on you and the other pupils, if you felt that the expectations weren't as high, did you think that affected you and the other kids?**

Yes. I think it made for a certain lethargy. When I first joined, like I say there wasn't the same level of academic teaching that there was, in what I consider to be, a mainstream school.

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### **Did that frustrate you? Were you aware of it?**

Not initially because I'd such a bad time at the grammar school, I think I just needed some time to get myself together again. I'd gone from passing my 11 plus with a very good exam result and so therefore I think I had a lot of expectancies placed upon me... I think it was even disappointing to me, not succeeding. But I can't say initially my lack of success was due to any academic failure, I think because it was simply my academic studies were affected by the attitude. So therefore when I joined Hebden Green I needed some time to just re adjust.

### **Was there anyone you could talk to about these things, at the time, were you able to talk to your parents?**

It wasn't as if I couldn't talk to anyone about this, it was just that I had too much pride that I didn't, if I'm honest. I just made up my mind that I'm was in this situation - I've got to get myself out of it, and I didn't do a particular good job of it. Kind of cut and run.

### **Why did you feel you had to get yourself out of it? Did you see it as your responsibility?**

No, not my responsibility, well perhaps I did think it was my responsibility because I was in that situation - I handled it myself and I didn't do a particularly good job of it.

### **How do you think that could have been otherwise if you were dealing with it yourself, I mean if you had the whole of the educational system to deal with, how did you think you were going to cope with that on your own?**

I didn't necessarily cope with the whole thing, I mean I coped with it emotionally on my own, and I certainly needed my parents help to start with. Getting the ball rolling regarding a transfer. But I certainly kept things to myself for quite a number of months.

Then it was getting on top of me and I was taking a lot of time off sick, I wasn't really sick - I think I just couldn't face going. So my parents cottoned on to the idea that things weren't as they should be, and so decided to set the ball rolling regarding a transfer, get me somewhere else.

## *Survivors from the Special School System*

**Did you ever think at that time or do you think now that what was happening to you should never have happened - that there should have been other structures in place to make sure you got the appropriate support you needed at the grammar school?**

I was only 12 at the time, I was rather confused that I'd gone through the primary school education relatively unscathed I should say. I had teachers and a headmaster that was always on my side, always encouraging me and it was very apparent from day one that I wasn't going to fit in. So it was just one thing after another, it was just a shock effect.

**When you were at primary school did you mix pretty well with any of the kids socially outside of the school?**

Yes, it was terrific.

**Once you went to grammar school did you mix all right there?**

No, because I was living in Gawsworth and the grammar school was in Cheadle, so all the children were of that area anyway, so no - I didn't mix.

**When you went to that school (the segregated school) did your social life change, were you able to have a social life outside the school with other kids?**

Yes.

**Where they non-disabled kids or disabled kids?**

Both.

**How did that work, I mean were you able to use public transport or did you rely on your parents?**

No. I used to do out of school things, I used to have after school activities, involving the other children, so that's how I was involved.

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**Did that spill over to the weekends?**

Yes, from time to time, children used to come to my house and I used to stay with other kids.

**Do you ever think about what might have been, academically, when you were capable of going through a grammar school system?**

Yes, Because I did my "A" level, no it wasn't "A" level, I did my CSE and "O" level and didn't do particularly well at them, but that was mainly my own fault. I didn't try hard enough for my last couple of years at school.

**Did you think that was more to do with what you talked about earlier - about the fact that people didn't have such great expectations of you? Or do you think you just lost it?**

I just lost it. It's very difficult to say really... I know people did have high expectations of me when I did so well and passed my 11 plus exam, apparently I got something right.

**How did you feel about going to a special school? Do you remember whether it made you feel differently about yourself? What I'm interested in is - you'd gone through mainstream education very successfully until you hit this rock at the grammar school and it might not have occurred to you that you were a disabled child at that time because you'd not had a problem - did it hit you hard?**

No it didn't actually, at the time. You know its strange that certain things are only just hitting me, well not particularly now, but in later life, things have only just occurred to me that didn't occur to me at the time. But maybe, yes - there's a lot of big buts or whatever. Perhaps if I'd done this perhaps things could have been a lot different.

**I only asked you because I went to special school and I went to a mainstream school for the last year and I didn't realise until I went to the mainstream school how I was actually disabled. I had no real idea of that. I'd gone to a primary school in a mainstream, then I went to a residential school where I actually stayed until the age of 15 and it wasn't until that time when I actually became aware that I was a disabled kid. That was quite a shock to me.**

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The shock came to me when I left primary school because I'd had four good years at this particular primary school where everybody accepted me and they didn't treat me any different. I got encouraged to join in everything else not discouraged whenever I played football, join in games or what have you. But when I went to secondary school certainly things changed. They didn't know how to approach me, how to handle me or how to deal with me. I think they just saw me as a bit of a novelty package.

**If anybody asked you whether you thought segregated schools are a good thing, or what should happen to disabled children, what would you say? I will ask you that, and put it to you in the context of assuming that mainstream schools had proper support services and had a proper awareness of what the issues are for disabled school children - do you think that children should be going to a segregated school?**

If someone with a disability has got the academic capabilities they should go to mainstream school as in many borderline cases they are sure to be encouraged. Without wishing to be unkind, obviously, certain people who have disabilities are not going to have the academic capabilities.

**Then do you think academic ability is the only criteria for going to mainstream school?**

Not necessarily, I think that as many people as possible should be given a chance. Because, as an instance, if it's the same as saying because people can't swim they are never going to be able to, therefore just because they have difficulty with academic subjects it doesn't mean to say they will never get that level of achievement, providing they are given the right sort of encouragement and the right sort of teaching.

**The reason I am concerned about the issue is because I feel that as long as we justify putting people away in institutions, and segregated schools are institutions - perhaps the first we get sent to... and that is something we, disabled people - must understand. Doesn't it actually help to justify keeping adults in institutions when the general public is used to the idea that disabled kids are automatically put away - segregated?**

I think there needs to be a lot more thought put into it than there has been over the years. There shouldn't be this automatic thought that so and so isn't capable and they are never going to be capable of certain things.

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**Does that matter? School is about much more than academic achievement surely?**

No, I don't suppose it does - I hadn't thought of it like that.

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### ***INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD WOOD***

**Richard, how old were you when you first went to a residential school?**

I was five.

**How was it explained to you, do you remember what your feelings were about going away from home?**

I can't remember it actually being explained to me. I can't say it wasn't, I just don't remember it being explained to me. I'd already spent about three years in hospital where I'd been away from home, so I suppose if someone said to me I was going away to school I would probably just put it in the context of, well I'm going away again, I don't suppose it would have been to me any more significant than that. Apart from the memories I have of being in hospital, which are full of nightmares. I had those for years actually, nightmares of the doctors chasing me down corridors and stuff like that. I had, I remember when I was about four I went into hospital to have an operation on my hips and the hospital porters on the way to the theatre, (I remember this as clear as day) told me I was going to the pictures. That I was going to see Mickey Mouse. Well, of course, when I got in there and they put the mask on over my face, that was a bad experience and that affected me for a long, long time. I don't particularly remember when I went to school, being frightened or apprehensive about that.

**Do you know what your impressions were when you arrived there?**

I can remember my first day at the special school and I think I arrived sort of mid to late afternoon, and as far as I recall, it was bedtime for kids of that age, and it would have been after tea so that would have been about 5.30pm or something like that. I remember being sat in bed in this very, very long dormitory with the only toy that I had. I remember that quite vividly -sitting playing with this toy in bed. I don't remember any one making me feel welcome or explaining what was going on and what it was all going to mean.

**Do you remember how you felt?**

Lonely, I felt very lonely.

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### **Was it a single sex school?**

No, and it was an all age school as well. It was a school that had about, at it's peak 85, 86 kids and they were all ages as I say, from 5 to 16, 17.

### **Once you'd settled in, what did you think? Did you find it easy to relate to the other children?**

Yes, I don't recall having any problems relating to the other kids that were there. It was just like "kids are kids", and you are with children of your own age. I think it felt very much like that, it was really about children together and adults doing things either to you or for you, rather than any sort of relationship. I think that's one of the things of course, that is quickly destroyed in a special school environment, that relationships with adults become very formal, they are either carers or teachers. You immediately start to lose any feelings of becoming part of a family or of being part of an environment where adults have a different relationship with you. I think that caused problems in later years.

### **What about the staff? Was it difficult, reconciling their role and how you felt?**

What you felt about staff essentially is what you thought they felt about you. I mean clearly, some staff you got on fairly well with because they would be fairly outgoing, and maybe some that would take some trouble to have a bit of fun with you and have a laugh with you, but most of the time it just felt like they were either caring for you or they were teaching you. I think with teachers in particular it was very difficult to have relationships with teachers because they saw themselves very much in that role of teachers. Others would be I suppose like house parents in a way because they clearly had that role. The way in which a special school works is you have care staff who have specific functions to perform and that may have been getting you bathed, or toileted or whatever, dressing and all that sort of stuff, because that is very much where their role always seem to start and end. Of course you had teachers who were not always teaching, but still because they were the senior staff, they had the responsibility of the general supervision of the school.

A good example would be a weekend, where every weekend you would have a key teacher on duty from like 9.00 in the morning till 6 at night. The problem was, even at weekends, they never stepped out of the teaching role, they were still teachers and you still saw them as teachers, there

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was just no relationship with a lot of them. The relationships you had were only around the activities that they felt a responsibility to. So if, for example, a teacher ran a camera club, which they would do at weekends, they still ran it as a teacher, like they were still teaching it. If you were doing the Duke of Edinburgh Award or something like that, it was like an extension of P.E., it wasn't anything about something different. So you were always in a situation where you really didn't have what you would call a normal relationship with adults. So I guess at the end of the day as kids you had to get on because they were the only relationships that you valued.

### **Do you think that the staff had an edge or attitude towards you?**

They were very disabling.

### **How was that?**

Well I suppose, their attitudes were not something that you necessarily examined while you were at school, you thought about them after you'd left school. I would say there's no easy answer because their attitudes span a number of different scenarios. They were, in my view, very disabling most of them and they used to make a point, some staff, not all of them, but some staff used to make a point of singling out people's different impairments so that kids would single out people's different impairments. You know, we were just as disabling as they were in a sense, because we learnt from them, so you'd be making fun of somebody with a particular impairment because they made fun of them.

Even though it was a so called special school in my view, the school never took, (certainly while I was there, up to the age of 17) any account of any individual's impairment, and never provided anything that would help you, or anything that would assist you over and above the normal walking sticks, crutches and wheelchairs and all that sort of stuff. Even there, there was a lot of problems, because you weren't allowed to use your wheelchairs, you were expected to walk. So they were very disabling in that way, that they didn't recognise that people with certain impairments might have particular difficulties with mobility or whatever, it didn't actually matter to them whether you fell over every five yards on your crutches, using your wheelchair was still a no-no. So they were very, I think, disabling in that way and taught us really to be the same.

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The other factor that I touched on is when it came to the education system itself, and maybe I could give you some examples of that in relation to me. I had polio as a kid and I am naturally left handed, because my left hand and arm are stronger than my right, but I wasn't allowed to write left handed, so I was taught to write right handed and I cannot write right handed. Even to this very day I can't write right handed, I hate picking up a pen because my writing is appalling. And it got to the stage where, because my writing was appalling the Headmaster, who was actually my form teacher as well insisted that I print everything. So I had to print in block capitals essays and all sorts of stuff like that, and if I didn't then I would just be sent away to do it all again. That was a specific case where they should have recognised that I was naturally left handed and should have been allowed to develop that as a skill, but it wasn't seen as a skill, it was actually seen as a weakness. But that is back to the tradition, which was very strong at that time, traditional educational teaching was that everyone had to write right handed. That was true in all schools, but for people whose impairments made that almost impossible it was dreadful, and you wonder were they were coming from really, and I've been self conscious ever since about my writing. Best thing that happened to me was P.C.'s. because I no longer have to put my spidery writing all over the page.

**Since you've touched on the actual work and the issues around the education at the school, what was the curriculum to you? Was it interesting, did it stretch you - what were the actual implications to that size of that school?**

Well I have to state first that I'm profoundly opposed to special schools, and for a number of reasons. Firstly, I think it is very unhealthy for a child to go to the same school with the same teaching staff and the same care staff for eleven years, or nearly twelve years in my case from being five until seventeen. Because you get to a situation where if you're performing badly you're never in a situation where you can get a new start. You're never in a situation where you can go to a new school or into a new class with, maybe, people who are going to take a different view or a different perspective of what your problems might be. Maybe as kids you do have problems learning things and I think that is sad, and I think that is profoundly damaging.

As far as the curriculum goes, kids there, I did "O" levels. I didn't pass any because I never got beyond the end of the first question on any exam, because I had to print, so that was just a problem for me. But then of course because you could never complete a piece of work you just basically became labelled as stupid. They would have no qualms about using those terms. "You are basically thick" I was told by one teacher because I could never complete a piece of work in class

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because I had to print. The opportunities were there to do "O" levels, even to do "A" levels but only if you performed "as a normal kid". Only if your impairment did not restrict you sufficiently to cope on a normal level. The head master had been at public school, and I felt very often that he saw this like a public school - his own little Eton you know, who praised the kids who could perform, who without exception were performing at a normal level, because their impairments didn't impede their progress, whilst the rest of us were making up the numbers, it felt like that in many ways. It was sad really, because given the right approach, given the right encouragement you could have come out of school with pretty good qualifications.

### **Had you ever thought you could have dictated your papers?**

Oh no, absolutely not! I don't ever remember being offered one piece of equipment, or one other method for putting work out other than you have to print in block capitals every word that I put down. Which is a fairly big disincentive to learning. I'm not saying there weren't parts of school I didn't like, I mean like every kid I had subjects that I liked, I guess to some degree. There were subjects that I was reasonably competent at, and others that I wasn't really good at.

### **Apart from the usual, strictly educational activities, what other activities for pupils did they lay on, or be encouraged to be involved in? What was the social side of school like?**

Well I guess most of the time it was pretty much what we made it. But I have to say, unlike stories I've heard about some other special schools, where kids were led around in chains, you know, all holding hands and that sort of stuff, that really wasn't the case where I was. I am, I am reticent about using the word fortunate, but its all relative in a way. This school was in the middle of the countryside, 24 acres of ground, it had a river, it had a lake, so we used to go fishing, we used to go canoeing. We had active Guides, Scouts, Cubs and Brownies and stuff like that so we used to go camping. Even though it was in the school grounds we still used to go camping, we used to make bonfires, we used to cook food over bonfires and all sorts of stuff. We used to play football, cricket and whatever until it was coming out of our earholes. It was all our own making, they wouldn't have stopped you doing anything within the school grounds that was a legitimate past-time. If you wanted to go fishing you didn't ask permission, you got your rod and went down to the river and fished for the day. O.K. - if you wanted to go canoeing you had to ask permission because the boathouse was locked, which I guess was reasonable.

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**Well what about the trips out to the town? Because you can be awfully isolated.**

Well we were, and that has massive repercussions when you leave school. You tend to think that the special school environment is the real world. I mean particularly in the early days it wasn't just that we were completely segregated from the outside community, though we were. The outside community would be invited in to things like the annual garden party, or maybe, although I can't actually remember this as such, but maybe the school play. We used to do an annual school play, but I rather think that might have been an invited audience for the good and the great, the local good and the great.

One Sunday every month we went to the local church. We were taken on a bus and we were brought back on the bus. We were, yes, we were very isolated. We were also isolated from our families, because in those early days your family was only allowed to visit you for two hours on a Saturday afternoon once a month. My mum and dad lived 150 miles away, in days when transport wasn't as it is. I can remember my mum saying they used to have to leave about 5.00am in the morning, so they would get up there for 2.00pm and at 4.00pm they had to go home again. It was absolutely crazy, amazing. It wasn't that you were just isolated there, you were isolated in every way.

**As you got older and the years passed on, did you start to have any conscious thoughts about the school? Did you start to assess it? What issues were there for you when you were in that kind of assessment? Did you discuss any of that with other pupils?**

Yes, One good thing, in a sense, was that being in a situation where I said, you were really isolated from adult relationship, you formed very strong bonds with people that you are with. I mean in my case probably two or three absolutely excellent friends that I still, even if I never saw them for twenty years, I could come into the same room as them now and we could pick up from where we'd been and it would be like we'd never been apart. There was that much of an empathy between us.

But I came to hate the school, I even hated it when I was there. I hated it more when I left. Because as time has gone on I've discovered more about myself and about things that I've lost, and things that can never be replaced. But I hated it because I couldn't actually see how it was helping me. It just seemed to be, I mean that educationally I just knew I was never going to achieve anything. I hated it because I thought it was me, I actually thought that I was the problem. Because I'd been

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told always that I was a problem. Not only was I a problem, I mean I was a problem educationally for the reasons that I've explained, although I was in the GCE stream, so they must have thought I had something somewhere upstairs. But it was like the whole thing you see, because I got a reputation as a bit of a rebel, and I don't think necessarily that I was anymore of a rebel than any other kid my age, or particularly a teenager growing up in the sixties, which was a rebellious time anyway. I mean we listened to the pirate stations and all that sort of stuff, so we were picking up somethings of the outside culture. And of course we were into the start of that era where we had record players and radios and stuff like that. We were very much into the teen culture and trying to grow our hair long and constantly being whisked off by the school barber and all that sort of rebellion. But I got the reputation, I feel, because I was the oldest person, I was the oldest out of all of the kids there. I remember one classic occasion when, believe it or not, I was actually sat doing some homework, which was a unusual occurrence for me, but I was sat doing some homework in a classroom and the headmaster came and told me off, because some of the students were over in the school block, a hundred yards away from where I was, were making a lot of noise. But he came and told me off, because they were following my example - that was what he was saying. And so because I'd had many years of that, of being labelled as a trouble maker, I was in a no win situation. There was nothing I could do that gave me another chance. This is part of the problem as I said, you couldn't get rid of your history. If you were a sod at seven you were a sod at seventeen. Because that's the way they saw you, once tarred you were tarred for life. You never became a different person in the view of the staff.

When my kids left junior school, and went to senior school or secondary school as it is, they were seen as teenagers, because the teachers are used to dealing with teenagers, they've dealt with them all their lives - they know what teenagers are about, they know where they are coming from. But I'm always seen as Richard Wood, and its amazing you know, that when I go back, very, very rarely now, but I have been back for the occasional garden fete, because I know that that's a time when I'm likely to see my mates who where there. That's a recognised day when people go back. And the staff still speak to you exactly the same. You know I'm 48 and they still speak to me as if I was 14. And they still relate back to things that happened when you were a child. This is the care staff, staff I knew - who saw me grow, who passed on "legends" to new staff. I remember when I first left school we used to go back quite often, in the summer to camp when the kids were on holiday and new staff would come and say "oh yes", with that knowing kind of voice, "oh yes, I've heard about you".

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**It's sort of flattering but a sort of patronising at the same time, isn't it?**

Yes, but not good though, not good.

**One thing you didn't touch on when things were bothering you, was with your mates. Did you ever talk about it? Another one, but I think you've already talked about this, was, did any of you wonder why you were there? You did wonder that didn't you?**

It's difficult sometimes to, you need hindsight, and you need perspective to be able to bring some kind of rationality to it you know. I mean the thing that struck some of us was that probably half the kids in the school were people who had asthma because they came from around Teeside, which was very heavily industrialised at that time. A lot of smoke, a lot of fog and smog and all that sort of stuff, so they came to school for their general health. While they were there they were just like any other kid in any other school. We used to wonder why that happened. It was also part of the problem with the staff in expecting all kids to be the same, because a lot of the kids didn't have physical impairments or sensory impairments in a way that we would now understand them. I'm not saying they didn't need an environment but why they had to be taken from Teeside to North Yorkshire was a bit of a curiosity.

**Reading carefully what you said about being pretty isolated all of you in a sense, being away from home for as many years as you were did it have any effect on your family life or your relationships with your family?**

I think it destroyed my family life, absolutely, I don't know my family. I had this discussion with my partner Sue. She's got brothers and sisters and I've got three sisters and I never ring any of them. And curiously enough they very, very rarely ring me. I've also discussed this thing with my mum. A number of things I feel profoundly sad about. My dad died five years ago and I never really knew him. My relationship with my dad really started when I was nineteen or twenty because no sooner had I left school, then I was sent to a special college so the old institutionalisation continued. So I didn't actually come home full time so to speak, until I was about nineteen and by that time the relationship between my dad and myself was just totally antagonistic. Because I guess I wasn't the son he wanted and he certainly wasn't the father I wanted, although now I'm not sure what I actually expected from my father, because I'm not to sure

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what a father does. I can never forgive them for that, it has taken away a part of my life that I can never replace.

### **When you say "them" who do you mean?**

The people who promote segregated education and the people who reinforce it. Be they parents, educationalists, whatever. I don't think there is enough thought given to the social consequences and to the damage that is done by sending kids away from their community. It wasn't, (you were asking about my family), it wasn't just about my family. I never looked forward to going home in the school holidays. That's a curiosity in a way because I hated school, I really did hate school, and I can't say I hated being at home, because I can't say I was never loved at home I just didn't feel comfortable, I never felt that I belonged there. I loved, my younger sister and my older sister especially. I mean I loved them a lot and I used to really look forward to seeing them. But within two or three days I couldn't wait to get back to school because I really wanted to see my mates.

### **When you were home were you able to develop friendships with local children.**

I hadn't got the faintest idea where to start. There was a kid, another lad who was a couple of years older than me, who lived about three or four doors away. I think that was a problem, the particular road where I lived there were not many kids there but I just didn't know how to relate to them, I just didn't know how to relate to them at all. They clearly didn't know how to relate to me either. Now that was a problem right up to my adult life, right up to being at work I guess. Before I made friendships that became lasting friendships I went through all my teen years quite a lonely person. In particular, as a teenager, having relationships with girls and things like that was such a problem.

### **Even though it was a mixed school?**

Oh no there was no problem there. I'm talking about after leaving school. No problems at school...I'd plenty of girlfriends at school.

### **How old were you when you left that school then?**

Seventeen.

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### **When you left how did you feel, do you remember?**

Elated. My dad gave me a fag in the car and I felt bloody brilliant, I'm out. Honestly I felt so good. We won the world cup shortly after so it was a good year.

### **Even so, you were leaving a place you'd always looked forward to going back to at the end of holiday time and you were moving into, for want of a better word, an unprotected environment, how did you feel about that?**

Well the first issue is about leaving school and what that meant. What school ultimately meant at the end of the day was two good friends. Two good male friends I had, and my girlfriend. Although it was a while before I had transport to pick up on that relationship I actually went out with Diane for many years after leaving school. Diane and Lee and Paddy were my two friends - we were all leaving at the same time. I left mid term and they left about two weeks later, I don't know why I left mid term but I think my dad had said well we've had enough of him there and we want to come and pick him up. So I actually didn't feel at the end of the day I was leaving anything because they were all leaving as well. I knew that in a couple of weeks they would be home as well.

### **Were you apprehensive?**

Yes. I was apprehensive and also very naive. I thought life was just going to be cosy and straightforward as it always had been. That it was only a matter of knocking on someone's door, which is what you did then because no-one had a phone. That it was only a case on knocking on an employers' door and you would have a job, that you'd soon be in a job and you'd soon be earning money, you'd soon have a car and be able to do all the things that you wanted to. You got more and more disillusioned as you went on. I actually got quite depressed, very depressed I think within six to nine months of leaving school.

### **Why were you disillusioned?**

Well I'd failed my exam, which was no surprise as you know I never got past the first question on any written paper, so that was no surprise to me. I'd also spent literally weeks going round to local employers and come across some real, real absolutely blatant prejudice. I'm sure I don't have to

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elaborate how much that really hurt. People made it very plain that if you were the last person on earth they wouldn't employ you. That just got totally, totally demoralizing. Then of course I was sent away to this college at Mansfield to learn a skill.

**You talk about hindsight, now you have the benefit of it can you tell us what you feel the legacy is for these years - long term effect?**

That's difficult. It's made me, and I'm not saying this is really healthy, it's made me fiercely independent but not necessarily in the best of ways. It's maybe because I've had to find my own solutions to my problems. Because I've never had anyone I could go to. I couldn't go to people at school because the adults weren't interested. I couldn't go to my family because I didn't know how to raise issues with them or what to expect from them. I think that must have had an effect on me in my role as a parent. I feel sometimes that I detach myself from situations. I think that's how I've learned to cope with them. I seem to internalise quite a lot, which again is not a good thing. I find it difficult to take issues to people and try and talk them through, although sometimes I'd feel I'd like to. I think the other thing about special schools, that I've only just really come to terms with is that I was physically abused at school by one particular member of staff for many, many long years and that frightened me, it frightened me a lot. I saw people being sexually abused there, I was never sexually abused, but I'd seen it, well its crap isn't it. You don't talk about those things, well you could never in those days.

**Segregated schooling is still a big issue for disabled children. What do you think the issues are now?**

Well I think the issue in terms of the principle of civil right's to mainstream education is still the same. I think today we recognise it as more of an issue than we did thirty-odd years ago when I went to school. I can't think of any circumstances where a rational argument could be put forward that a person should be taken away from their family, and be taken away from their community and put within a system of containment and then to argue from that, that it was for that persons good. That it's in the best intention; that seems totally illogical, and I can't see that it happens to any other sector of people in society.

**Do you think segregated schools should be abolished then?**

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Yes, but not just because I hated it.

**Well, obviously the arguments for closing down segregated schools are becoming clearer, and are being taken up by disabled people, parents and educationalists, but the integration of disabled children into Inclusive mainstream schools is not going to be simple, and I don't mean only from the financial resource sense - what do you think the issues are about closing segregated schools ?**

Well you can't just close segregated schools in a vacuum and nothing else happening. Changing the educational system in this country for disabled children has to go hand in hand with changes in society for disabled people. Because education anyway is only useful and meaningful in a context of what you might ultimately call full citizenship - that is the right to employment, further and higher education, the right to live a lifestyle of your choice and to take advantage of the options that are there to other people. These things have to go hand in hand and it all has to be part of a programme of change. The part of the programme has to be about equality education in schools that present disabled people as equal people, as people with rights. In a similar way its like talking about independent living, independent living isn't about moving a person out of an institution and putting them into four walls somewhere else, where they are probably just as segregated as they were before.

**It has to be supported.**

It has to be supported but there also has to be a purpose to it. You see one of the problems with segregated education as I understand it is that the particular emphasis is put on the protection of the child rather than the academic attainment. They are deemed to be at risk so there has to be a medical criteria in there like you shouldn't be in a normal school environment or you're going to be at risk. Although given the figures for physical and sexual abuse of children at special schools they seem to be more at risk in there. But that's by the by. What I'm saying is that I think disabled children have the right to have their expectations raised, but those expectations ought to be realised. So inclusion has to go hand in hand with the ban for exclusion in all areas.

**Is there anything I haven't asked you that you have in your mind about the experiences you have had?**

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I wouldn't recommend the experience. There is nothing to recommend it -there really isn't, it's damaging, so damaging. It's a sad thing really that things happen to you in whole areas of your life you can just never reclaim, and you just know that you have missed something, the strange thing about it is that you're not sure what you have missed - because you can't make the comparison

**One of the main issues emerging from these interviews is that we feel don't have the ability to socialise.**

Absolutely

**And that covers a wide range of activities. I don't mean leisure pursuits.**

The issue is about how you deal with discrimination and oppression because you can't believe how people react to you, you just can't believe it, and I think that's one of the reasons I got so depressed.

**When - after you left school?**

Yes - after I left school I couldn't believe that people were so awful. I couldn't believe that people actually felt comfortable about saying the most awful things to you just out in the street, just passing the time of day. I still get cross about that now, that people feel they can say what they want to you. Of course you don't learn to take on board any of that or build up any strategies. It takes you a long time to learn, a lot longer than you think.

**Finally, do you ever think you can deal with that satisfactorily in your own mind?**

No. Its like racism, I don't think you ever should come to terms with it because if you come to terms with it you accept it. It hurts all the time, and it serves as a constant reminder of the kind of society we are trying to live in, and which we are struggling to change.

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### **ANNE RAE - THE EDITOR'S - TESTIMONY**

All I remember about mainstream Infant's School is break times - and being corralled in the little fenced school garden, away from the main playground, with a couple of other luckless tots chosen, by the teacher's I presume, to keep me company.

Memories of Primary School do not carry much more detail - I remember lunchtimes though, because my brother and I went home for lunch, and I remember running all the way home - at least a mile - I checked it out years later.

And then, suddenly, I was at boarding school. I was eight and half; there are no memories of being told I was going, just of getting there, arriving. It was a long journey from Surrey into Kent, where the school was, but I do remember my father stopping the car at the gates of the long drive leading to the school, and looking at the peeling board stating that this was a Shaftesbury Society Home for Disabled Girls, which was apparently part of the Ragged School Union, well, according to this board it was. A great reader of fairytales at the time, bewilderingly, it did cross my mind that I was a poor little rich girl about to be abandoned in a workhouse. That feeling proved prophetic.

We were met at the door of the old mansion by Matron - a short woman with a hugh bust, spanking white apron and cap, and she must have shown us round, and then seen my father and brother out. I must have been in a state of shock, because I remember nothing of the early days there, except for being called into Matron's "office", in reality a rather comfortable room, to be told my mother was dead, and that I should pray with Matron for my Mother. It was so strange... having been sent away from my mother, it seemed almost fitting, inevitable, that she actually was dead.

From the outside the building itself was as it had probably been since built, a stately home set in acres of wonderful land, but inside all evidence of grandeur and comfort had been stripped. A hugh dining room containing four long tables was where we thirty eight girls ate and spent most of our spare time - there was no common room or play room. Other rooms were classrooms (two), kitchen and staff rooms, and a hugh bathroom housing two whopping old baths and a row of sinks. Those sinks - if it wasn't a "bath day" for us, we had to strip wash at those sinks - sometimes the room was freezing - and we also had a rota for knicker washing duty which was done at the sinks. Piles of navy knickers - we'd wash them, then chuck them across to the bath for rinsing and mangling. All the other laundry was sent out.

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What the school was was a hothouse of religious favour. What with morning assembly, evening prayers, Sunday morning Chapel and afternoon Sunday school, and the never ending religious tracts and pictures on the walls, it was little wonder that we girls kept "coming to Jesus" or reporting visions of him. "Coming to Jesus" was a big event for all. Once any of us decided to do it, we'd tell a nurse, who would relay the news to Matron. Then the flushed convert would be taken along to Matron's office, and she would give thanks to the Lord and a sweet to the repentant sinner. After that the good news was relayed to the school at Assembly, and a certificate was handed over to the new, and by this time, pretty smug Christian Soldier. The trouble with all this was that the inevitable fall from grace was horrible, and very public. One's first misdemeanour after the celebrations resulted in Sister, who had a voice like a foghorn, bellowing for all the school to hear "And THIS is the child who came to Jesus". Whatever the sin, retribution included public confession by the sinner at the next Assembly, missing supper on the day of discovery, and if the crime was dreadful enough, having our monthly visitors cancelled. This happened to me once for laughing in the dormitory after lights out. It is very hard from this distance to believe our parents concurred with this, but then all our letters home were read, and so were letters from home before being given to us.

Academically it was dire - we were split into two classes by age - 8-12, 13-16. I could read and write from the age of five, but I remember no lessons remotely resembling education as I had experienced it at Primary School. I suppose there must have been some... I do remember pails and pails of wet newspaper to be used for the disgusting artform known as papier mache work, we went for long walks to find leaves to stencil, and there was always the blinking rabbit hutches to clean out.

Apart from the monthly visit from home when our parents took us out (if they came), and the odd school trip, we didn't leave the premises from term beginning to end, and of course we became institutionalised and insular. We had nothing in common because we were taught nothing which triggered our imagination beyond the struggle for approval from the staff and Jesus - and this struggle was very divisive - those of us who jacked it in were less than kind to those who gamely tried to win it - "Pious little creep" was probably the kindest thing hissed in their ears by passing lost souls.

The loneliness was incessant - without stimulation we had nothing to chat about, and no common experience of note - our notion of belonging to a family became eroded as the years passed. I could

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not have been the only one who simply could not understand why I was there. None of us used wheelchairs or had any kind of walking aid - our dormitories were upstairs; we all walked miles on the leaf collecting trips, and to Sunday Chapel. What we did have in common, but never did acknowledge, was that our families had sent us away... I wonder if that secret hurt stopped us from being close - perhaps we had the unformed thought that if our families didn't want us, no-one else would or could?

Reading was my magic carpet out of that place - I read everywhere, under the bedclothes, in the lavatories, after meals, and in various hideaways in the grounds. Apart from the pleasure, the knowledge, and the dreams the books gave, all that reading became the bedrock of almost total self-sufficiency - loneliness, or being on my own, became a desirable state instead of a source of misery, and I've never been able to shake that off, to my regret. There was also, for me, the increasing awareness that the death of my mother resulted in the death of family love, so there was no contrast between school and home - no going home from coldness to warmth. My father signed his letters to me "Yours sincerely, J.D. Rae" until I screwed up the courage to suggest to him that this wasn't the usual way that a father signed letters to a daughter...thereafter it was "Love, Dad" - but I felt this was concession to my protest and convention.

I must have consciously realised why I was there at some point, because during the time I believed in Jesus, I'd pray every night to wake up better, not a little crippled girl, so that I could go home, but I woke up every morning a carbon copy of the self who had gone to sleep, praying the futile prayers.

Entreating my father to take me home had no effect, but belated rescue did come - the Headmaster of my brothers' secondary modern school lived in our road, and after seeing me around during holidays, he asked my father why I was not at that school, and when challenged Dad had no reason - so for a year I went to mainstream school, caught up on most subjects and became Head Girl - I was happy, stretched and fulfilled at last, but the aloneness was entrenched. Trouble is, after all these years one can never know whether that is how one is and would have been whatever, or whether that is what being cast out from day to day human affection, which is the effect of segregation, inevitably results in.