

## CHAPTER 10: CRUEL SCHOOLING

I started school at just under 4 ½ years old. As I wrote before; I ran home at the break on the first morning and my angry Dad dragged me back. The school was the West Dean Church of England School for infants and elementary grades. It was situated opposite The Selsey Arms public house. A handsome school building of red brick construction. Another village building said to have been, at least partially funded by the James's family, on land donated by them. It was a boys and girls segregated format, with separate play grounds for each sex.

The infant's class was composed of mixed genders and my first teacher was Miss. Pemberton, who taught the infants. She was the most kind, considerate and good teacher and I have fond memories of her class room.

Quite the opposite character was the Headmaster, John Woodrow, who taught the boy's class. He was about 40 year's old and I shall describe that he was a sadistic tyrant towards young boys. I went into his class at 5 ½ year's old to suffer a nightmarish and difficult education. Mrs. Woodrow taught the girls. However, on to John Woodrow, whose very presence and vicious demeanor are etched in my memory; even at 80 year's old. If I strike my finger tips and cause pain, I immediately recollect his predilection for exacting pain and anguish from small boys. He was about 5' 8" tall and tended to plumpness. He always wore a tweed jacket, waistcoat, trousers and brown shoes, winter and summer. He smoked a pipe incessantly, even in class; as well as bad breath from this; consequently his teeth were yellow from nicotine and were worn down on one side, by constantly holding his pipe with them. He would get very sweaty in his clothes, particularly in hot weather and would emit a revolting animal body odor. I knew this especially, because I was often close to him when he was caning me; for actual or assumed misdemeanors he accused me of. He picked on certain boys in the class, whose parents were not likely to complain or bother him. At that period of time it was usually, me, Becky, Pragnell and Smith. We all went to school every day in dread of being called out in front of the class. "Dunk, come out here!" and, I knew I was going to get caned.

My offence was usually that I spoke during the lesson. Little boys were expected not to speak for over two hours at a time, unless they were spoken to first by the Headmaster; a difficult thing for a garrulous boy used to conversing freely and daily with people. I and my selected classmates could get anything up to six cruelly delivered slashes on the sensitive tips on the

fingers of their held out hand.. He was very accurate because he practiced on boys almost every day. The first time this happened to me, I showed my black and blue bruises on my fingers to my mother and she went to see Woodrow, He lied to her and said, I was very disruptive in class.

My Dad said, I probably deserved what punishment I received. From then on at home I always secretly kept my bruised fingers out of sight by clenching my fists. My fingers were, at times, so painful that I could not write properly and then I would be chastised by Woodrow about my bad writing. On occasions his super pleasure was to cane young boy's bare bottoms. His victim was made to prostrate himself across his desk; with the naked rear pointing out very embarrassingly towards the assembled class. One could get up to twelve lashes by this method; resulting in long red and bruised welts. The cane was shaped like a walking stick and was made of Malacca cane. It was about 36" long and 3/8" in diameter. Very strong but sometimes split with the force of use and brought blood from cut skin on boy's bottoms. Woodrow would then go and grab another cane; he had a stock of these canes in a cupboard and they were obtained from the Education Department. The latter were therefore guilty conspirators in this barbaric practice. The blacksmith's son Ron was the same age as me and once he was caned. Now Mr. Warner, the blacksmith, as I have described earlier, was a formidable and imposing character of medium height but great broad shoulders and bulging muscles and sturdy on his legs; a veritable oak tree of a man. Apparently, he went to see Woodrow immediately upon hearing about the caning of his son and told him in no uncertain terms and language, that he was never to physically chastise his children again. Woodrow could tell him if they did anything wrong and he alone would be the one to punish them. Ron was never caned again after that time. Yes, he was very selective with each boy he attacked, in fact, any boys of parents with whom Woodrow associated, local farmers, Estate executives etc., were never caned, although they were just as guilty of indiscretions as minor as speaking in class. These days such reckless disregard for inflicting pain and physical and mental injury on little children, would probably put him in jail; where he actually belonged. Headmaster Woodrow always locked his class room door so that no one could enter unannounced when he was engaged in his nefarious activities involving his extravagant and self satisfying corporal punishment of children. Even his wife was not allowed in. I don't believe she knew the full extent of his predilection for inflicting pain and misery on his young pupils. I believe she was afraid of him anyway. I know that I was psychologically affected adversely and sometimes displayed anti-social behavior. However, I am somewhat of a

stoic nature and did not commit extreme bad faults. One boy that Woodrow picked on repeatedly, who, I remember, was of a nice friendly and amiable nature when he first started school and I befriended him. Eventually, at about the age of nine, he obtained an air pistol and shot neighbour's cats and dogs and did nasty physical things to them; finally he went berserk and shot at other children, hitting one in the eye and she lost her sight in that eye.

Headmaster Woodrow taught boys from about six year's old to fourteen year's old. A new intake of the younger boys would be placed together in one section of the classroom and they remained and grew up in that section. After one reached about 9 years old and up, Woodrow did not use physical abuse on them; he turned his attention to the young new-entry boys and gave them his applied doses of 'hell'. I suppose he preferred the young delicate hands and small asses.

Mrs. Woodrow, in contrast, was a very sweet and delightful person and teacher. She taught plays and musical shows in the main hall to mixed gender classes. These were wonderful periods of relief from the rigors of Headmaster Woodrow's class room.. We learned songs and stage plays. This included David Copperfield by Charles Dickens. I was David because I could easily remember my lines. We also did The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare; I was Bassanio in that. The last play-musical I did at the school was The Mikado by Gilbert and Sullivan and I was Poo Ba. I learned his songs and those of every other actor-singer in the cast.

The school curriculum was; reading, writing, arithmetic, including a bit of algebra, geography, history, music and religion: Church of England style-King James Bible version. Extra curricular activities were: working in a kitchen garden up the road from the school. The Headmaster always had a nice supply of vegetables from there. No one else did. Also, the school had a beehive on the lawn in front of the school building; I am not sure who had the honey each year but can guess who.

The school choir performed for the parents each year and once we went to Brighton and competed against many other Sussex County schools. I had a boy-soprano voice and was chosen by Mrs. Woodrow to sing solo: The Trout by Schubert; as a choir, I believe, we came in second place.

Headmaster Woodrow intensely and obsessively taught all the academic subjects, filling lesson times with as much work as possible. Even with the overbearing atmosphere in the classroom, I was able to assimilate knowledge better than most of my classmates. I could always read advanced books for my age. After all, I read the newspaper every day at home and living

my only-child life, I read all the books lying around at home: IE: Shakespeare, Dickens, The Bible, Rider Haggard, Tarzan books and various poetry books. My Dad liked Zane Grey books and he used to borrow every week from the library, about two of this author's books. He loved the Wild West stories of cowboys, horses, guns and Indian tribes. I too, read each of these books avidly; they were easy to read in relatively simple language. It's ironic that I have ended up living in the South West of The United States of America for the past 31 years; where, a large number of Zane Grey's stories were set. He actually lived on Catalina Island just off the coast of California; opposite the mainland where I now live.

Mr. Warner the village blacksmith had three sons, the middle one was Dick and he was a 'hole in the heart' child and was physically very delicate. His skin and lips would go quite blue if he exerted himself. Ron the oldest, was his protector at school and to some extent, so was I. In those days surgery on the heart was considered almost impossible and unheard of as being successful. There was a lot of bullying by the older boys against the younger ones. This was due to the wide range of ages from 4 years old to fourteen.

During the early part of the Second World War; we had an evacuee who attended our school and he suffered from epilepsy. Ron Warner and I were chosen by his mother to take care of him at school and on the long walk to and from there. She explained the affliction and what might happen. He could fall without warning, go into a semi-conscious state, thrash around with his legs and arms, whilst foaming at the mouth. Certainly a new learning experience for Ron and I. The main thing we were told to do was to hold his wrists so that he could not hurt himself or others and see that his head was protected from hitting the ground or anything. After only sometimes a minute or up to five minutes he would stay in this unpleasant state and then slowly recover. He never remembered anything about these episodes.

After the war was declared by Britain, against Germany, Mrs. Woodrow started to teach us in the English language, the national anthems of the Allies, IE: France, Greece, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and etc. Eventually America, when they entered the war. I believe it was in 1941; a Canadian battalion and their convoy of army vehicles, stopped by The Selsey Arms public house, opposite the school, I guess for refreshments at the pub and a meal break. The Woodrow's gathered all the schoolchildren together on the stage in the central hall, boys and girls that formed the school choir. All the windows were opened wide, then we sang the Canadian National Anthem, O' Canada. There was a long wait and we were all ushered back into

our classrooms but soon we were ordered back into the central hall and there stood a group of Canadian army officers, pistols in holsters on their hips and soldiers waiting. A senior officer thanked us for our rendition and we sang O' Canada again while the army men stood to attention. Headmaster Woodrow just wallowed in the glory of it all.

Another way Headmaster Woodrow hurt me was because he cheated me from advancing to high school. He had been paid to tutor a local farmer's son in preparation for high school and he and I were chosen by our school examination results to go to the Lancastrian School in Chichester for what was called the 11 Plus examination and test. I actually came out with the best marks and the examining teacher wanted me to go to the high school. There was only one place from our school. Woodrow argued the case for his tutored pupil with the examining teacher and I lost the opportunity.

My Mother and I went to see the examining teacher to appeal my case for entering high school but he said he could do nothing as there was only one place and Woodrow insisted that the high school take the other boy.

There were impoverished families in the parishes outside of West Dean; one example was a farm worker family that, when the father came and got a new job on a farm and there were five children in the family; several came to our school for the first time in bare feet and they had walked over a mile to school. One has to remember it was unlawful not to send your children to school and they did benefit from the free lunch (Even though it was terrible fare). Members of the Parish Council and the Women's Institute charity; got together and provided the needy children with free shoes. Upon questioning the children, they elucidated from them, that, apart from school lunches, they survived at home on water, half a boiled egg and a slice of bread each day. The children were also unwashed with lice in their hair, because there was a shortage of soap at home.