

## I HAD A DREAM...

*(Record of an interview, child interviewer, Rosemary Cathcart responding).*

**Q** How did your dream about One Day School start?

**A** At first it wasn't about One Day School. That came much later. My dream was about somehow making people care more about each other. I felt very, very passionate about that. I had seen too much of people being thoughtless and uncaring and hurting other people, damaging their lives. My family was very poor. For some years when I was growing up, we lived in an area where all our neighbours were rich - one had a full-size tennis court in his backyard, for example. Some of our neighbours were very unkind to my mother because we were poor and made her very unhappy. Then one of them had some very bad things happen to her, and instead of helping her, the rest all turned on her. That started me thinking about how much cruelty and selfishness there was in society. I also realised that when people were treated so unkindly, they could lose their confidence and their ability to stand up for themselves, and so their lives got even worse. I thought somehow it must be possible, there must be a way of helping people understand each other better and treat others more kindly.

**Q** When did your dream start?

**A** When I was young - I think I was about intermediate school age when I started to worry about this. Certainly by the time I was 14 I was clear that this really mattered to me and I wanted to do something about it. That's important. I think you will find that many people who have dreams that drive their lives first have those dreams when they are young. But people often laugh at you if you are a child and you say you have an idea or a dream about what you want to be or do. They think because you are young, you don't know what you're talking about. That's not true. If you have a dream now, hold on to it - don't ever let people put you down just because you're young. Keep your dream in your heart and know that this is what you're aiming for.

**Q** How did your dream turn into One Day School?

**A** I didn't think people would change themselves. What I had seen of our neighbours' behaviour had made me think that you could not rely on people to see for themselves the need to be thoughtful and kind, or to be strong enough by themselves to stand up against selfishness and cruelty. If people could not learn this by themselves, then perhaps you could teach them. So I became a teacher.

As a teacher, I worked with different groups of children, but when my own children came along and turned out to be gifted children, I discovered that this was one group of children who could be treated particularly unfairly at school and I started to try to find out how to teach them so that school would be a good place for them.

I never had the chance to teach my own children and I couldn't do much to change their teachers, but I could work to make it different for other gifted children, and my own children helped me with that - they gave me lots

of ideas, as did the children I did have a chance to teach. The ideas that eventually created One Day School came from my first experiences in working with gifted children and watching how they worked and listening to what they said. I think adults should listen a lot more to children's thinking.

Once I had begun to learn more about what to do, I began to teach what I had learnt to other teachers. Eventually I decided to set up a centre so that both teachers and parents would have a place to come to if they needed help for a gifted child or wanted to learn more about such children. So I set up the George Parkyn Centre. At first we just ran courses for teachers and had consultations with parents, but after about a year we sat down and thought about all the things people had talked to us about during that year: and we decided that a programme was needed for the children themselves. So we started One Day School.

Of course that meant we had to find a place that we could use as a classroom. That wasn't easy. We had no money, and the government wouldn't help us. Eventually we found a church which had an unused crypt - like a hall beneath the church and mostly below ground level. It was very dark, and when we first went in, it had huge cobwebs from floor to ceiling. It also had lots and lots of mice who wanted to eat our food and our resources. No-one wanted to kill them, so I had to find special mousetraps that would not kill the mice. We caught them and let them go free in the park across the road. Later we moved into the proper church hall which was a bit better, though when it rained, sometimes the rain used to come out of the light switch! And we had a possum living in the roof. You could see his fur when he sat on a crack in the ceiling. Nowadays, of course, all our One Day School classrooms are in schools, but the early days were fun too.

Q How did you actually get it all to work?

A When you have a dream, you can't just tell people about it and expect them to do what you want. You have to get out there and make it happen. You have to think about the practical things that are needed to make it work - you have to have a practical plan. Your plan may change and develop as you go along, but you must, right from the outset, start thinking about the "how" part of accomplishing your dream. You can start that with your dream right now. How will you make it work?

For example, when we set up One Day School, I had to think about where will we find a home, how will we furnish it, how will we let people know it is happening, what systems will we need to put in place to make it work - how will we assess the children, what records do we need to keep, how will we find the right teachers? There were no easy answers to any of these questions, especially since we had no money! But when you really are passionate about what you are doing, when you really believe in it, then that gives you the determination to find a way. Thus for example we didn't sit around and wait for someone to give us lots of money to buy luxury furniture, we went to the Salvation Army and bought old sofas and tables and chairs and bookcases very, very cheaply and got going.

If your dream just involves yourself - for example, if you want to be a writer - , then you can start working on that by yourself. But if your dream involves other people, then you also have to learn how to persuade other people to listen to you. You need to have all your facts, you need to have a

really well-worked-out plan to put in front of people, and you need to have the courage to front up to people, no matter who they are. Always treat people with courtesy; never think anyone is too important or too scary or too powerful OR too unimportant to talk to. You may need to talk to newspapers or people in government or your local council - go for it!

Q Was it hard?

A Yes. At times it has been very hard. Partly that has been money. You are always struggling to find the funds to keep going, to pay the rent, to pay people's salaries, to buy resources, and so on. It also means that you may have to ask your own family to go without - you do not earn very much money while you are turning a dream into reality. But the hardest thing is that when you are trying to change something in society, you are doing battle with other people's attitudes and ideas. It seems that many people, sometimes even your friends, find it hard to understand that someone would truly do something just because they believed in it - most people seem to think you only do things because you yourself are going to get a reward from it. People can also be afraid of change, and so they can be very rude and very cruel to someone who is trying to change things. People can even try to destroy something that is new or different, and they don't always care if they hurt someone in the process. Many times I have had people say very unkind and hurtful things to me because I have been trying to support gifted children, and I have even had people who have deliberately said untrue things in order to try to stop the work we are doing. That is very hard to deal with. I think most people who fight for a dream have experiences like this.

Q Is it worth it?

A A thousand times YES! There is no greater satisfaction in life than to know you have genuinely helped another human being. To see a child start to smile who has been sad or lonely or angry and unhappy at school - that makes all the hard bits worth while. I would not change a thing about what I have done with my life.