

SCHOOL DAY.

A TYPICAL SCHOOL DAY AT SJD.

A typical school day? The school I attended was an all-boys grammar school in Cheshire. I was surrounded by boys in uniform, men in gowns and, in the case of the headmaster, Mr. Hopkins, a man with a mortar board. The curriculum was not recognisable when compared with the curricula of today, but we thought we were 'ahead of the game' when our French teacher introduced us to slides, featuring a French family, under the banner of 'audio-visual learning'. The French grammar text books, involving 'real learning' were reserved for when we became older and 'more mature'.

We met the sentence '*Jean ecoute la radio*'. It struck me that Jean appeared to have a smug grin across his face when he was '*ecouting*' his radio. I was never sure why. Perhaps it was because he had achieved international star status, despite the mediocrity of his achievements. Having condemned Jean as a boring, self-satisfied individual I was even more shocked to discover that his sister, Colette, '*regard la maison*', an activity which was even more mundane than Jean's. What kind of family was this? As a young man at an all-boys school, I was not aware of the habits of teenage girls. If they spent their time staring at houses I decided to forget about them and stick to rugby.

At SJD we played rugby, not football, as this was frowned upon as an activity for those attending the Secondary Modern schools. People ask me if I enjoyed the experience. I compare it to American football, with one very important difference. In American football you are allowed to tackle anyone, whether they have the ball or not. That is not the case in rugby, when you can only tackle someone who is in possession of the ball.

This rule led me to develop the skill known as 'the hospital pass'. For the uninitiated the hospital pass involves the person with the ball, me in this case, waiting for the oncoming forwards to approach in their full ferocity, before offloading the ball to an unsuspecting teammate who would then be flattened, having had only a split second to appreciate the danger he was in. Many a time I was heard to utter the words, 'Sorry about that. I didn't realise...'

But perhaps the most significant difference then was the attitude towards 'critical thinking', a concept that was unknown at SJD where you were expected to take notes, learn things off-by-heart and regurgitate what you had memorised in an exam. This philosophy even stretched as far as extra work, meted out if you had transgressed in some way, such as wearing your tie with your top button undone.

Instead of being asked to write a piece which analysed your rationale for dressing as you did, you were instructed to write 100 lines which said, 'I must not disrespect the history and heritage of my school by having my top button undone'.

As Mary Hopkin once sang, 'Those were the days.'

497 words.

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