

Were Dinosaurs Real?

I don't remember my first day at school. I went into the kindergarten class as I was 4 1/2. The teacher was a Miss Coveney, who I remember as resembling Olive Oil; tall, thin, with shiny wavy black hair and sensible brown lace up shoes!

It was a strange choice of education by my parents, Stanborough infants, which was an independent Seventh Day Adventist school. My mother was Catholic and my father Church of England. However it was the closest school to where we lived and just a short walk across an orchard, to a beautiful estate. Plus my father had been a pupil there.

My memories include the navy blue gingham dress, a smart blue blazer and a straw boater. The school motto on the blazer badge was 'Dominus Magister Ludi Nostri' – God is our Master. There were lots of bible stories, selling Sunny Smile photos to help the starving children in Africa and vegetarian school lunches. The Adventists had strict beliefs excluding meat, alcohol and caffeine from their diets. We enjoyed long nature walks with Miss Coveney in the park and woods, and sitting under a large cedar tree listening to stories of Brer Rabbit and Uncle Arthur. School memories are also associated with the pungent smell of the Granose factory on the estate, making breakfast cereals. Wheat and oats were baked throughout the day. There was a laundry, a 'sanitorium', by then a maternity hospital and a church, all within the grounds. Once a week assembly was held in the church with the infants, junior and secondary pupils coming together. The school also took boarders from the age of 8, usually children of missionaries.

The harvest festival was a grand occasion, I remember the fresh cut flowers, usually dahlias in all colours and vegetables bought in from home, plus the wheat sheaf shaped bread, with intricate details of mice and birds fashioned in the offering. These were probably made in the Granose factory. The hymn 'We Plough The Fields and Scatter' takes me back to those early school years, sitting on the wooden pews and listening to the Pastor. I actually now have one of those pews in my home, after the church was rebuilt. Sports day involved sack races, relays with bean bags and of course, the egg and spoon race, taking place in a field by the orchard, now a housing estate.

The strangest part of the school ethos was gluing together some of the pages of our text books! We were taught about God creating the earth in 7 days, a text book we were using had some pages stuck together. Of course, being an inquisitive child I pried them apart, otherwise I may never have known about dinosaurs! As the Seventh Day Adventist didn't believe in evolution, the dinosaurs couldn't have existed.

When I hear stories of other people's school days I feel extremely fortunate to have had support from dedicated, kind teachers. They taught me about many important things in life, except dinosaurs!