

The Headmaster`s Tale

Trevor Jeavons

As headmaster of a special school, Trevor has special responsibilities for the children in his care. It`s a kind of job which could easily take over his whole life - if he let it. Because of this, perhaps, he isn`t exactly your typical head teacher. Self confessed “lunatic pianist” in a rock and roll band, would-be sci-fi writer, his life is woven with many threads.

Before I came to Milton Keynes I was working in Cambridgeshire for the Spastics Society at their biggest residential school. My wife spotted an advert which said that a headmaster was required at a special school in Milton Keynes. The angle seemed to be that the school was to be a resource for the community. I wasn`t particularly looking for a new job but this looked like it would be a new sort of job. Anyway, they must have been short of applicants because I got it. The building had been waiting empty and boarded up for a year. Either funds weren`t available or things couldn`t be made ready to start when the building had been finished. It was the difference and the challenge that brought me to Milton Keynes. All my family wanted to come which was lucky, they thought it looked an interesting place.

Oliver Wells School is a day school for children disadvantaged by physical or visual handicaps. We don`t have dozens of kids in wheelchairs because a lot of the problems are hidden, asthma for instance. The main thing is that these children could not cope with ordinary school life. Hopefully, after a period of time at Oliver Wells they can move into an ordinary school situation, but that doesn`t always happen. If you`ve got a child of good intelligence but who cannot move or speak, it takes a lot of work and a lot of research to put special equipment that child`s way, so they can communicate. It sometimes turns out that they have to stay in a special school for a long time. The age range here is from two years old in the nursery right through to eighteen year olds and although there`s no official provision for them when they leave, we do try and help them either find jobs or continue studying.

I`m not satisfied with the provision made for disabled people in Milton Keynes. Some thought has gone into it, but it`s the old story, unless you or your best friend have been stuck in a wheelchair you don`t think about wheelchair access which is basically what we`re talking about. For instance, at the railway station the only way onto the platform for a person in a wheelchair is using the goods lift. You`re stuck in the baggage compartment anyway, because if you`re disabled that`s what you are when it comes to public transport. Things look alright until you`re stuck in wheelchair. The answer is easy, all you do is get all the councillors and architects to spend a day in a wheelchair and then the whole world changes.

The Lunatic Pianist

My hobby is the T-Bone Boogie band. Some head teachers play golf, some are in the local choir, I`m a lunatic pianist in a band. I suppose it is more extrovert than most. Actually, a lot of my teacher friends do amazing things but because I`m in T-Bone everybody knows about it. I don`t know what people say behind my back - perhaps I should be sitting at home reading about disability, I don`t know. Generally I don`t think people think you`re better at your job if you only think about one thing. But to everybody in the band day-jobs come first because that`s where our main interests lie.

I trained as a painter - an artist, not a painter and decorator and one of my sons is at art school. I`d like to be a good artist - whatever that means. I`d like to study sculpture, I`d like to write, I did write a book called `Art and Cerebral Palsy`, and I found that interesting. And I wrote a long paper for the Spastics Society on severe subnormality and art. I`ve been to Iceland to lecture on heart therapy and my wife and I have done workshops in art therapy in Portugal and we`re going to lecture in Athens this Autumn, and probably going to Dublin this Easter so that`s a nice hobby too. That`s a an extra thing we do but unlike T-Bone people don`t know about it. Art is an occupation that anyone can do. If, magically there were forty-eight hours in a day I wouldn`t be T-Bone Boogie-ing all over the place I`d be into lots of things. I`d like to write science fiction, I`d like to learn to play the guitar properly - and the piano. So I can never be contented. Life is usually very ordinary but we can make it extra-ordinary.

It might look to others as if the Jeavons push our children into things we`re already interested in. My daughter Della is in a caring job, she`s a psychiatric nurse, but we never got her the job or anything to do with it. I have the feeling, certainly with my own children, that if you try to do something they go and do the opposite. For instance my son Dylan plays bass and he once or twice played with T-Bone Boogie, but he doesn`t want to at all because what I`m involved in is finished, it`s dead, it`s geriatric rhythm`n`blues and useless as far as youngsters are concerned - quite right too, that`s an healthy attitude.

The only bad thing about Milton Keynes is the negative people. I`m surprised how few people do things or fight things here. I`ve seen this apathy in teenagers, old people and the disabled. Milton Keynes is a good place but you can`t just sit and wait for things to happen, everyone has to do their own little bit for the community.