

1969-1972 Keswick Hall and Beyond

Mary Bolton's reminiscences

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KESWICK HALL 1969—1972 AND BEYOND

My three years at Keswick Hall were a wonderful transition from youth to adulthood. There was a freedom of the kind I had not previously experienced, yet it was within a relatively safe and nurturing environment. No responsibilities such as a mortgage, or children of my own to worry about.

My college mother introduced me not only to the Keswick Hall buildings and routines, but also to Mangreen Hall, where she and a group of five others were in digs for their second year. It seemed such a wonderful place that I was determined to spend my second year there, too. Was it coincidence that led me to become part of a group of six friends? It certainly went in our favour when it came to applying for accommodation, and in September 1970 there we were, happily settling in at Mangreen.

We shared three rooms at the top of the house – Margaret Rudd with me, Angela Moen with Kathy Wade and Linda Rathbone with Carol-Anne Mildred. Mr and Mrs Duffield were such interesting landlords. They lived in one half of the Hall, while a sister lived in the other half. Their daughter Philippa and younger son Christopher must have been away at school for most of the time we were there, as I don't remember them too well during this time. However I do remember their older son William who was living at home. One of his ventures was pig rearing. How I recall the smell when William came home in the evening! William took great delight in regaling us with tales of tricks he had played on former students, and how they had never managed to catch him out. That was until we undid the end of his toothpaste tube, removed the toothpaste and replaced it with cream cheese.

Mrs Duffield's boast was that she never repeated a menu during any term, and she was an excellent cook. When we had a birthday she would also let us choose our favourite meal. Every year the Duffields gave their group of students a nickname, usually based on their eating habits – the vultures, the gannets etc. We were the milkmaids, due to the vast quantities of milk that we

consumed; usually in the form of hot chocolate at bed-time. The Duffields are still in contact with the vast majority of their previous students and send out an annual newsletter to dozens of us. Since our time there the Hall has been set up in trust as a Healing Centre, which has its own chapel. The Duffields retired to the converted Hayloft many years ago.

After I left Keswick Hall I went straight on to Manchester University for a year to train as a teacher of the deaf. It was a year of extremely hard work and I faced even more growing up. I found I was in conflict with the ideals of the department, but without the strength of character to challenge their oral philosophy, which meant that to them sign language was taboo. I experienced two very unhappy teaching practices in residential schools for the deaf, and vowed I would never look for a job in one.

Consequently I began my teaching career in a Partially Hearing Unit attached to a primary school in Ipswich, where I was very happy for three or four years before the birth of my daughter. I hadn't planned to return to teaching before my daughter started school, but in the end had my arm twisted to take on a part-time job in a small village school when Emma was barely three years old. In those days head teachers could be fairly flexible and my daughter came too! It wouldn't work like that nowadays.

I taught in mainstream primary schools since then - all ages from reception to a mixed class of years 5 and 6. On the whole I have enjoyed my profession but that changed following my husband's sudden death. Teaching is a hard job at the best of times, but I found it difficult to cope with increasing pressures at work and with all the jobs that still needed to be done at home.

It is now seven years since David died and although I still miss him very much, I am learning to enjoy my independence. I have moved house and have bought a property by the coast where disabled visitors come in the summer months to use the self-catering holiday annexe.

I am involved with various voluntary groups, so always seem to

69-72 Mary Bolton

be busy. I am a local Health Walk leader, helping to organise short walks in the area to encourage people to get out and exercise. I also help to run an informal computer group, teaching basic computer skills. It is great fun helping people to come to grips with modern technology when their average age is about 75!

Having trained to teach deaf children I have always maintained an interest in that area, but now work with deaf/blind people. I volunteer with a group of elderly adults with dual sensory loss, which is quite challenging. They are all interesting characters in their own right, but communication can try one's patience sometimes. During each session we try to involve them in a practical activity such as making candles for Christmas, as well as tasks like quizzes to keep their brains busy. At the last meeting we sang songs, which was great fun! For many of them it gives them the opportunity just to chat, which is quite difficult for them to do now.

In between times I enjoy travelling, especially if it involves walking. I have been on many walking holidays in this country and abroad, but I have also recently taken part in two fund-raising treks for my local hospice, contributing a total of £8,500. The first trek took me to Peru and the Inca Trail, a truly memorable trip. The main challenge of walking there was coping with the altitude, but the scenery was incredible and made it worth putting up with all the difficulties. My second trek took me to the Himalayan foothills of northern India, where the challenges were of a completely different kind. There was so much evidence of poverty. The difficulties of eking a living from the countryside around them must have been so hard for the local villagers.

The changes in my life have increased my awareness of how lucky I am. Even though my income is greatly reduced since leaving teaching I never have to go hungry. I live in a quiet, unspoilt part of the country. I am still able to travel and enjoy life.

Mary Bolton (1969-72)

