



## **WHAT MADE ME WANT TO BECOME A TEACHER**

Like a lot of idealistic young people I wanted to become a teacher because I felt I could ‘make a difference’ to the lives of others. I felt that I had something to offer; I particularly wanted to help Caribbean and other ethnic – minority children. I felt that my experience of growing up in Sixties Britain equipped me well for such a role. Ironically enough most of the schools that I have worked in, for any length of time, have nearly all been virtually ALL white schools.

### **THE EARLY DAYS**

To begin at the beginning my parents were part of that great Pioneering group who came to England in the Fifties in response to the requests made by the British government for manual workers. My father was a Carpenter by trade and my Mother had been doing clerical work but had passed her exams which would qualify her to train as a teacher. She hoped that she would be able to pursue this ambition once she had settled in England.

Despite the difficulties faced by Jamaicans in those times; finding accommodation, racial prejudice in all its guises, my parents, through dint of hard work were able to save up enough money to buy a house and to send for me and my orphaned cousin. I was then five years old and came to South London to join my sister who had been born soon after my parents had come to England.

My Education however had begun in Jamaica at the age of four where I had attended a small fee – paying school and had begun to develop a love of books. I quickly streaked ahead with my reading. Education was the key to success and my parents were keen for us to avail ourselves of all the opportunities that were on offer. There was much that even as a young child I questioned; the belief that Great Britain ruled the world and that all other peoples were somehow inferior pervaded everything. I saw this belief in text books, reading books, advertising, school’s programmes and in the ordinary conversations of every day people but I refused to believe it and set out to prove it.

### **SELF – BELIEF AND AN IDENTITY**

At the age of nine I began to get books out of the library that told the story of slavery and the experience of the Black diaspora; things seemed to fall into place I was beginning to

work out where the prejudice in the form of name calling that we were experiencing was coming from. I did not feel inferior and refused to accept that was my lot in life. My mother had been brought up to be proud of who she was and she had instilled that virtue in us. As far as I was concerned West Indians had made a great contribution to the wealth of Britain and ‘they, the British should be grateful!’

Armed with this positive outlook on life I felt sort – of ready to take on the Bigots as I entered a co-educational Private school in Bromley. I was, however, completely unprepared for the Imperialist and Xenophobic views that spewed forth from my rather austere History teacher and my lovely ex – ‘British-In-India’ Geography teacher. My Geography teacher of whom I was very fond had actually told us that the African people were enjoying an harmonious existence under Apartheid. Even with my limited knowledge I could not accept that this might be true; did not all men want to be free especially in their own country? I was not prepared to accept any kind of derogatory remark from my peers and I developed a range of cutting ripostes designed to educate the ignorant.

## **SELF BELIEF**

What fed my imagination was the fact that my ancestors had suffered unspeakable treatment at the hands of slavers and survived The Middle Passage so there was something to be proud of. I had descended from people who were strong, who were survivors!

From an early age I had this desire to communicate with those who did not know, I felt I had something to offer. There were however two teachers who had a great influence on me. Interestingly enough, they were both foreigners on was Mrs Green (she was Greek) and the other was Irish, they were both my English and RE teachers, respectively. Mrs Green encouraged my love of English, I hung onto every word she said, she exhibited a combination of strictness and humour. I wanted to be just like her. My RE teacher encouraged us to ask questions about life and to seek to discover the truths for ourselves. This has formed the basis of my belief about Education.

After completing my ‘O’ Levels I went onto a local Girls’ Grammar School to do my ‘A’ Levels. I decided to study English, History and Religious Studies and then to go onto a Teacher Training Course in Yorkshire because I wanted to see a totally different part of the country.

## **A TEACHER OF DRAMA**

My love of the Arts had started at a very early age and although I was training to be an English teacher I always knew I would teach Drama; this was my first love. Right from being a small child I had loved Hollywood films and the medium of television in general. I expressed this fascination in preparing my own improvised or scripted plays. During my first teaching post in a small Secondary Modern School I began teaching Drama as a part of English, branching out into producing my first School play.

Colleagues were helpful but basically you have to find your own way and be prepared to take up opportunities wherever possible. The important thing to remember is that learning does not stop once you become a teacher but it is a lifelong process.

During the early years of my career I decided that it would be a good idea to have more qualifications. Through the Open University I gained a BA Degree in Humanities and, later an RSA diploma in Drama in Education. I have worked in a range of Secondary schools and it has not been all plain sailing but self belief, determination and a little help from friends and there will always be colleagues who are willing to help, has enabled me to persevere. I am currently Head of Drama in a large Comprehensive and we are perceived as being a highly successful department. (Ofsted Reports 1994 & 1998).

I wanted to make a difference to the lives of some of the children that I taught; I have included in the Drama schemes of work a unit on Racism and Slavery: for most of the white children, their parents and some of my colleagues, I might be the only black teacher or fellow professional they ever come across. White British people need to see what is possible as well as having their stereotypes challenged. Black and mixed race children need to see black professionals.

Teaching is much harder now that it was in the seventies but it can be very rewarding particularly if you are determined to make it so.

MM December 2000