

Chapter IV.

Times newspapers – Colour Scanning Studio – Newspaper Supplements – Union problems - Recession – Job Application – Teaching – Interview – Further education, LCP– Lecturer, Pre-printing – NATFHE – Garnet College – Teacher Training.

It was unfortunate that I didn't get the job with Times Newspapers... setting up a brand new colour reproduction department would have been quite a challenge. Nationally, the printing trade suffered a 'loss of standing' - by the closure of outdated printing works - the public thinking the industry faltering - not understanding that to re-equip a modern printing works the old machinery has to be removed first, which was no simple undertaking...!

The industrial recession in the middle of the decade went on, to the extent that even those firms known to be productive and progressive were losing work. The union's short-sighted view about the affects the new technology was going to cause to future industrial relations limited the speed industry was to take to climb out of the mess. This is not a criticism but a description of the way unions work. They operate on a day-to-day basis especially when unemployment and unrest threatened... they have no option but to pander to the cry for work...

School fees and extra curricular activities were stretching my finances - a drain, to continue for many years. I had to devise a plan - to cushion this insecurity - lessen the affected of industrial disputes.

Sally was now working part-time and some of her money was finding its way back into the kitty, it was not enough in times of hardship to hold the fort. She objected to her earnings being for household bills - wanted to spend it on what she chose.

In 1975 there was an advertisement in the Daily Mail [*Throughout its life The Daily Mail has set aside a special advertisement section for printing vacancies*] of a vacancy for a Lecturer Grade II in the Graphic Reproduction Department of The London College of Printing. This I thought would be an answer to the fluctuating industry... I sent away for the application form, and letter setting out a list of duties

Filling in the form I signed, dated and posted it - 1st. February 1976, to receive back a letter giving time and date for interview... that April. This coincided with the family's Easter holiday at the YMCA. I caught a train from Eastbourne to London... with suit packed...!

As an apprentice I had attended The London School of Printing, Bolt Court, not far from Doctor Johnson's House and The City Literary Institute - just off Fleet Street. The School moved to The Elephant and Castle, later becoming a College... the college's first year and design courses installed in Waterlow's old building, in Back Hill, Clerkenwall. Now I was attending the college again... only this time, to teach...

When I emerged from the tube station, the college tower block presented its towering floors directly opposite... Its partly shrouded exterior, blurred by polluted light, resembled a Victorian engraving - a forbidding picture...; its ground floors windows shaded by roller blinds giving a backcloth to numerous student posters... the effect being to simulate a post revolutionary military headquarters. This structure forever circled by a dizzy gyration of never ending traffic - hooting, screeching and thundering out an intimidating, pulsating roar... Never was there a more depressing sight. Gone the Dickensian charm of Bolt Court - the closeness and intimacy of well-known newspaper printing houses, cafes and coffee shops, that over the centuries contributed to the nation's, and printing's heritage. Here was a building of the sixties with all its non-architectural skills blatantly obvious... that bleak period in architectural design.

Still, I was there to try to protect my future so I had to give it my best shot. The pay just allowed me to survive with help from Sally's salary - the holidays would give me a chance to be at home with the children which was an enormous plus...

I knew already a handful of lecturers - two had actually taught me from the section I was about to teach in - one retiring – whose position I was filling, and six I knew from industry. As the manager in a progressive company which had the latest equipment I felt capable of holding my own. The company had employed ex-letterpress men to train, so I was versed in the art of passing on skills and theory.

The interview faltered because the selection board chair told me that whatever happened they could not offer me a Grade II position. They felt it only right that they should grant that position to someone who was already there - been promised that post for a long time. They were kind enough to say that the advertisement held the wrong wording. It transpired that they had offered the LII position in-house – to a grade I lecturer... it was for that now vacant position I was being interviewed for...

I do not think there were more than three applicants. Certainly, there was none with my qualifications. I was told, by the Chairman of the selection Board that in the event of being offered the job I would have to undergo teacher training - a new government measure to protect teaching standards. Eventually all lecturers in Further Education would need a teaching certificate.

After the interview, I caught the train back to Eastbourne to complete my holiday and tell Sally and the children what had happened. After a period of weeks, I received a letter, which informed me that 'I had been accepted'. I was still most unsure whether I should take on a job, which paid a lot less. The fact that Sally was now working did have a bearing on my decision to accept; that, and the hoped for stability that teaching would provide, plus the long holidays, swayed my decision.

I served my months notice starting to teach that Easter, in 1975, when I was forty. A new career seemed a radical step... I was excited by the challenge. During that Summer Term, I was in classes with the senior lecturer and department head to give me an idea of how to conduct myself and what teaching procedure I should adopt. He told me to attend his lectures and to take notes. In that way I soon became used to the routine and soon picked up the method of work. Much of it was easy and I felt I could cope with all that was asked of me. The London College of Printing had an annex in Back Hill, Clerkenwell that catered for first year students, design and foundation classes. It was explained to me that everyone had to take in turn being tutor to various courses ensuring that registers, attendance's, general behaviour and end of year exams were formally carried out in line with the course syllabuses and possible strictures laid down by external examination boards, training bodies and employer federations.

My hours were twenty-two hours a week – nineteen of those hours as student contact time. The day started at nine and could end at nine for evening classes. You were expected to prepare your own classes, provide your own handouts, devise models, slides, order visual aid projectors and liaise with the department's technical assistant to ensure all was arranged for the students. The technical courses covered City and Guilds examinations, printing trade courses designed for training purposes, the departments own two year full-time course, the technical content for other college courses, service design courses and a range of foundation, school introduction courses and employers start up courses.

Lithography was the growing printing process - taking over much from both letterpress and gravure. However, you can never be complacent in technical education... Those departments seeing that in time they will lose teaching hours - will plan to extend their teaching practice by stealth and have their outdated skills included in your syllabus. 'What is wrong with that', they will say, 'it will take up time in the syllabus and promote better understanding of practice and history - give a basic skill to first year students - apply old technical methods to give a grounding for future technology...'

Later, constructing a course that requires your participation, give their course greater credibility. Once the redundant staff fully converted, they will begin to increase their teaching

time... eventually taking over the whole course. It was castle building... first, the disguised expertise that later turned into an authoritative voice.

Department Heads applaud staff, who design courses - that draw students to them, particularly high level courses. This increases the status of the college, school and department. College authorities eagerly seek all courses that cater for overseas students... their up front fees pay for themselves and others too. The college authorities are not concerned that those students may be better off under another establishment's course.... it is about cash, student numbers and status. It is a dog eat dog situation and the college enrolling week is like a battlefield with clapped out teachers exhausted by having to act as salespeople and promotions experts; the winners strutting around flapping enrolment forms giving a full class list of first year students. How much better a continuation course of three years ensuring at least three years of teaching practice. Once you have a list of over sixteen students, you can start the course even if they have not paid. The teachers will hope to get the cheque from the student on the first day or night attended. Even then, the student may say that the employer did not pay up but he would by next week, or some other excuse. It sometimes took weeks to get the money and even if you did not it was difficult to stop the class because some students had already paid their fee. There was a cut-off of eleven places taken and paid for which would allow the class to continue. Even so, by the end of the course there maybe just five students left out of perhaps four times that number at the start.

These were all parts of the system that I had to become accustomed to. When my first term completed I was co-opted by the Head of Department to help mark the exam papers, total up the end of year results and make out the reports. Here was another insight into the new world I was destined for. The philosophy was, 'try not to fail anybody', because that was detrimental to a child's well-being and self worth. Which made excellent psychology, if some sort of effort had been made by the student - in many cases there hadn't been...; some students, over my years of teaching, just entered their name at the top of the paper and little else...

My knowledge of statistics, averages, and bell shaped curves, spreads, graphs, mean and norms suddenly escalated. How to describe a student's efforts without being abusive or using the same hackneyed 'could have done better' was achieved by having a marking script suitable for all scores and yearly comments.

Common room gossip abounded, a hierarchy place setting of desks and lockers, deference given to old established members not necessarily length of neither service nor status, but a hidden unspoken position commanding respect...

The National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education [NATFHE] represented the staff just as rigorously as SLADE & PW, NGA or NATSOPA had done in the trade. I was not escaping the influence of the unions at all. Here they all were the same members, just a name change. The alteration in working practices and changes in the labour market brought about by new technologies just as apparent.

Teachers knew that the public could not understand why the school holidays were so long. Years before children helped gather in the harvest - that is why summer holidays so long. What an outdated reason for establishing a course length!

Educational establishments are huge structures on massive land-sites requiring enormous sums of money to keep open. Having them empty, even for a limited period, is a waste of taxpayer's money. Staggered holidays, flexible working, shorter courses, instruction in the workplace, teaching by internet, all worth trying.

The biggest shock for me was not having to relearn chemical processes or writing on the board but qualifying for a teaching certificate. The last time I had written anything of length was at school twenty-five years before - I have already explained how bad that was. Completing a three thousand word essay-using quotes and indexation was an almost impossible task. For a start, I did

not know where to start. I almost literally had to go back to school and relearn what I had missed, what I had skipped, things I had never been told about and to work my way round the skills of higher learning and the intricacies of the library service.

I began by building a desk and shelving in our bedroom under the stairs, which lead up to the attic room. A chair found and I raided the library to provide some course books. A second hand dictionary and paper provided by the National Health Service made up the equipment necessary to start. With that, I started that September - a day release course at Garnet College for Teacher Training, learning about the secrets of educational history, sociology, psychology and philosophy. The class was of many people much like me - not long out of catering establishments, building works, printers and secretarial offices. Actually it was quite good fun and I could have made much more out of it if I had had more time and space at home. My first scrip completed I asked Sally to type it up for me. This gave her a headache for she had not a clue what I was writing about and no doubt, I was not making a very good job of it either. With that rather negative start, I looked around for a typewriter and found one through the Harrow Lyons Club, offered to me for ten pounds. Now I had the means to type my own essays. From that, day life changed. Every evening that little machine clattered away initially turning out terrible rubbish and finally something more reasonable; it also coped for setting out my lectures and notes. My first essay drew from my tutor Ray Harmon, the criticism 'convoluted' and my last was 'a good effort.' Each I believed to be generous and kind. What was more to the point I was learning and enjoying it and could recognise the difference it was making to me. However, it was a painfully slow learning curve. All this furious banging away at the typewriter was eroding what little time I had with the children. Still there were the holidays. The thought kept me going in moments of stress on many occasions. There were times when I actually enjoyed the discipline and the feeling that I was improving myself.

At the same time, I was attending Garnet College I enrolled for a technical certificate in printing techniques thinking this would be another means of procuring a further step towards the next grade of lectureship - something else to fill my curriculum vitae and show keenness. This quest for more qualifications caused endless worry and a great deal of time. It was not necessary to go over the top but felt keenly my inadequate education that I must compensate...

The things I had to teach were in the main out of date skills. The more relevant pieces of training were to do with judging the colour content of an artwork, relative to that produced with the tri-colour printing inks.

Apprentices and trainees have to be shown empirically, if possible, that the course they are following is relevant and that the skills they are achieving are those that are still current. College equipment should be the same or similar to that worked on by the trainee back at their place of work.

Training could easily be accomplished back at the workplace if it did not interfere with production. Colleges rarely had the latest equipment especially large machinery, robotics or other electronic gadgetry. Lecturers are rarely *au fait* with the latest production line techniques.

College staff vacancies rarely receive many applications, simply because the pay is usually considerably lower than industry. It follows that many lecturers are not the most skilled or come from firms holding the best equipment; they sometimes have little or no experience of progressive industrial work patterns or skills. As their teaching life progresses they become more distanced from reality. The only way they can keep up to the latest working conditions they are encouraged to visit firms and work places or retain a consultancy.

The heads of college departments are usually those who have served longest in education - they have normally, but not all, worked their way up the ladder of lectureship grades. Thus higher rates of pay correlate to time served and age. This also in most cases equates to time spent away from industry. Naturally, the graph would show these members of staff to be those close to

retirement and their pension. Unfortunately, it does not correlate to first class industrial achievement, vigour, first hand technical knowledge and hands on experience.

When I first went into education, I had no teaching experience, held no industrial diplomas, nor wrote technical papers. Although my industrial experience gained in the most advanced studios my power to change college working practices was nil.

Various departments in a college are always vying for power. This power normally based upon the latest invention or discovery, backed by published paper - this gave the department recognition and standing. Even without industrial backing, forceful individuals, who often spoke loudly - at one time might have been instrumental in advancing the departments position - exert a pressure out of all proportion to their knowledge. Now there was this revolution, brought about by electronics, these old college heads became left behind – felt threatened.

My introduction to teaching came at an unfortunate time, the onetime power was draining out of my particular section – retouching, taken over by the camera department, had always controlled the school's film processors and the rather ancient continuous tone scanner. The lithographic artists and retouchers, including various heads of section, over many years, had not pressed for these facilities being set in their ways not keeping abreast of working practices. In the trade many retouchers planned their own page positions leaving sheet positions to the platemakers. In college this working practice was not followed allowing other departments to take over that service... the result, as electronic technology advanced onetime hand skills dropped away...

I tried very hard to convince my section head to adopt this method of work [claim page planning as an integral part of the retouchers work]. The whole section could see that this would be a way of ensuring that power and relevance held. However, we did not have the proper light benches, could not easily turn one of the technician's rooms into a darkroom, in a near perfect world did not, and never would have our own film processor. Part of this came true but it was all too late. Other sections could see the necessity to broaden their base and naturally, they tried to retain their power – even at the expense of another's job.

It was sad to see what was happening, skills were being taught by individuals who had never done the job themselves... information given, that was out of date - and in some instances, incorrect. This situation had come about because the industry undergoing such enormous changes. The college did not have time to regroup, and reorganise before another innovation came on stream.

Into the maelstrom I found myself, sitting a teacher-training certificate and coping with a growing family. Simon had taken his 'O' levels and had gone on to Sixth Form College to sit 'A' level Physics, Biology and Chemistry plus an A/S in Maths. David was sitting his 'O' levels at the comprehensive school, Rachel attending Harrow Weald; Ruth, with David at Whitmore, Benjamin, in his last year at Longfield Junior and Rebecca, attending North London Collegiate...

The 1977 session completed my first full year of teaching. It turned out to be more successful than I had imagined. The skills I brought with me from industry had stood me in good stead - which experience far more up-to-date than the rest of the department – my age allowed me to be far more confident than my time teaching might indicate. If there were occasions when student rowdiness became a problem I could rely upon a story about my past to hold them interested. My late position in industry, as a manager of London's leading colour printers, gave me credence – as an authority, gave an abundance of relevant work solutions to correct production problems. Having completed National Service, tales about life in the Royal Marines always held their interest... having ridden and owned many different motor bikes this allowed me to enter their world. I am sure that having six children working their way up the school ladder gave me a fund of comical stories they could identify with... these were not talking points - of lecturers...!