

And So Began the Rest of my Life

Jane Drabble

One could say that most of my adult life has either been shaped around or shaped by the Playgroup Movement. I had always worked with the under 5's as a volunteer in a residential children's home in both the statutory and voluntary sectors before I moved to Anglesey in 1970. In February 1971 a small group of 'Young Wives' knocked at my door and asked me to start up a second Playgroup in Holyhead. They had already successfully started a Playgroup in the Morawelan area and now a couple or so years later were anxious to provide a facility in Llaingoch. Reluctantly I declined as I was pregnant and felt it improper to take on a commitment which I would be unable to see through.

However, in the Autumn term of 1974 I took my son to this very same Playgroup which was a member of the Pre-school Playgroups Association. At this time Wales had not yet become a Region of PPA in its own right. And so began the rest of my life. Little did I know how this experience which essentially I thought, was for my children, would change my life for the next 33 years.

I soon became very involved in Llaingoch Playgroup as a mother and began attending conferences in Bangor University, organised by the Gwynedd County Committee, which featured such eminent names in the Playgroup Movement as Brenda Crowe and Willem Van Der Eyken. I was hooked!

I began attending 'Open Branch' meetings organised by the Anglesey committee and met such unforgettable personalities as Barbara (Barge) Gibbons, Ivy Webster, Marjorie Dykins and The list could fill the rest of this article. There was obviously no escape from this highly motivated and

committed group of people whose enthusiasm was infectious and addictive and I knew this was where I belonged.

I went on to spend many happy but exhausting years as cover for playgroup staff and finally as the Llaingoch Playgroup Supervisor in 1977 where I remained for 14 years.

We went through the highs and lows of running a playgroup much as today. Very low wages, always fund-raising and scratching around to pay for new equipment and wages, long hours the majority of which were done on a voluntary basis, but the rewards were fantastic. Eager faces of children bursting with an enthusiasm to participate in anything and everything one provided during the hectic morning sessions. Like many groups we went through the anxiety of being turned out of our 'home' in Bethphage Chapel and as we all know finding premises is one of the hardest things to do. But we found a home in a condemned building in the grounds of the comprehensive school which was fine for a good number of years and we established a really productive liaison with the school. We had always been used for school placements but this relationship really flourished with the help of the teacher responsible for pastoral care in the school. This was another era in the life of the Playgroup. Our Playgroup may now have changed its name and lost its original identity but in my mind it will always remain Llaingoch Playgroup.

As a member of the Anglesey committee and a playgroup supervisor in 1986 when the Wales Region of PPA celebrated its 10th birthday, I helped to organise an event in the park at Holyhead. Several Playgroups from the surrounding area converged to celebrate the beginning of 'Teddy's Incredible Journey'. We cheered him off in a royal blue camper van, owned by the Area Organiser at that time, which was bedecked with royal blue balloons and from whence he continued his journey and travelled on a Squadron 22 helicopter from RAF Valley to a Teddybears' Picnic on Benllech beach. Crossed the Menai Straits on the Blue Peter lifeboat and went on to experience many other equally exciting adventures on his journey to Cardiff. Back at the park we continued to celebrate and play games. I can safely say I don't think I have ever been in such a huge circle of children and parents singing 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush' and numerous other songs,

to a bemused audience of passers-by, either before or after that memorable event. We certainly knew how to celebrate being a part of this influential movement of like-minded people

I was also an active member of Anglesey Branch Committee, Anglesey representative on the Gwynedd County Committee, Area Organiser and then aspiring to become Gwynedd representative to Wales National Council

I loved my time with the children and made many friends both with the

people who worked with me and the parents who brought their children to the group. I continue to have offers of accommodation and invitations to go back to stay on Anglesey from the people I forged friendships with all those years ago.

I can truly say that when my son joined the Playgroup I had no idea what I was letting myself in for but I wouldn't have missed all the opportunities and experiences I have been involved in over the intervening years. It is true to say I have grown old, fat and grey with Wales PPA!



Teddy's Incredible Journey