

I've Started and So I'll Finish!

Di Horley

My first introduction to the Playgroup Movement was in 1975. My son had just celebrated his second birthday and I had recently given birth to daughter number one. This latest event had left our son most unimpressed to put it mildly, firstly he would have preferred a brother and failing that a second dog would do, especially a puppy!

It was during one of my positive moments and a rare quiet time that I noticed an advertisement in the local newspaper advertising the fact that there was a Playgroup operating in a village Hall in Cosheston about six miles away. I eagerly phoned the contact number and, having ascertained opening times and directions, two days later saw us, son, baby and I, arriving at the hall.

Trying not to appear too eager to relinquish Keith, my dream of two hours respite with just baby was quickly dashed. Keith had to be two-and-a-half years old before he could be left because of insurance issues. Whilst talking with the other mums I realised that I too had need of adult conversation and companionship. Husband Alan was a Merchant Naval Officer and spent time on board ship for periods of three months, sometimes longer, at a time. By this time Keith was playing in the sand tray and sizing up the competition consisting of other little ones busy doing! It was pretty obvious to me that I wasn't going to easily persuade Keith to leave. Baby was asleep in her pram over in the corner of the Hall and then the supervisor uttered the words 'Why not stay? Keith can play as long as you are here with him, you could make us all a cup of tea or coffee and chat'. Big mistake, the first of many!!

The next five months flew by with our little world revolving around three sessions a week of Playgroup. Keith played, fought, charmed and

developed rapidly in every direction and baby of course she developed, and was stimulated by all the attention and last but not least so did I. I had not realised how starved I was of adult companionship and all that went with it. As time went by I became competent at mixing paints, cutting and sticking, building with bricks several bricks high, singing and reading stories and my Keith did not do too badly either!

Then oh dear, the Supervisor arrived one morning with the news that her husband had been successful in obtaining promotion at work and that the new job meant relocating to North Wales from Pembrokeshire. What was to happen to the Playgroup? Well as I now know that when in the Playgroup Movement you are in doubt you call a meeting! We did and the rest as they say is history. I took over the Playgroup along with an assistant who eventually was joint leader with me. We did this job for several years for the princely sum of nothing!! What did we gain? Our two sons went free and by then baby daughter was in playgroup in her own right. Debbie called me Auntie Di during the sessions in order to be the same as all the other children. If she had a problem or a question then she went to talk to the other Supervisor Auntie Gill. Gill's son Dan and Keith were now moving on to School. I gradually became more involved as a Branch committee person, Area Organiser, the County Chair followed by Development Officer and finally, and it is finally, as Regional Executive Officer (REO) for West Wales. Whilst County Chair of the then Dyfed I was privileged and scared witless to address and help host the Inaugural Wales PPA meeting in Aberystwyth in 1987 when Wales PPA became independent.

I am writing this as I near the last few weeks of work before retiring. It was thirty years ago that my and the family's Wales PPA adventure began, nearly half a life time as Keith is now thirty-two years old, Debbie almost thirty and our bonus Andrea, or Andie as she is known, is twenty-five in September.

It was whilst pregnant with Andie that I left Playgroup as Supervisor and Andie when of age and when ready, attended the newly opened Village Playgroup. By this time the Wales PPA bug had really bitten me and it is only now, thirty years later, that I am making my escape. There is no doubt

in my mind that at times Wales PPA saved my sanity and made me the person that I am today. What is it that they say? Grow old, fat and grey with Wales PPA!



Quieter moments in Playgroup