Reminiscences

ROLAND JAMISON

I am lying in bed listening to the sound of not so distant small arms fire, tuning in to the police radio to find out where the disturbance is. It is 1976, I am seventeen and a pupil at BRA. Tomorrow is another day and I know that, despite the danger of certain parts of Belfast, my school is a haven where I am not only physically safe, but secure in the knowledge that I am valued. Surely these are two of the most important things a young person can have. Thirty-four years later, the shooting has stopped, I am a teacher at the same school and I am extremely grateful for the opportunities extended to me in my formative years. Like many generations, I have lived through numerous transitions whilst at the Academy. Mine was the last year group to have slide rules, the last 3rd XV to play the staff rugby team, one of the last year of boys to see girls’ knees at school before skirts became so long, and the last boy to wear short trousers in Form 3! I witnessed boys using the same staircases as girls in the Jackson, the Maths rooms becoming the Library, the Prefects’ and Monitors’ rooms being levelled to build the Art block. So many experiences – so many memories. Believing I would be arrested being driven up the Cavehill Road by Noel Lamb, shaking the school bell out his window as he drove; yet another post school play party. Idolising the band members of ‘Sunset’ at the school dance while Miss McIlroy extracted the ‘snoggers’ from behind the curtains. The only alternative to the school night-life was a bomb scare-interrupted visit to the New Vic Cinema. This was nearly as exciting as ‘Merv’ Semple setting fire to the bench in Chemistry at the mildest encouragement from the pupils. I saw the first Sponsored Walk, the Royal visit, the last games at Ballywonard, had my first flying experience with the ATC, played the lead in Stephen Connolly’s first school play, and saw friends accepted to read Medicine at QUB with two Bs and a C.

In many ways times have changed, but in one fundamental way the Academy is still the same – a haven. A place where the blazer is a blank canvas waiting to be turned into a unique work, a place where diversity is not only tolerated but expected and a place where young people are given the opportunity to equip themselves for life.

2390 Squadron (BRA) Air Training Corps

TREVOR BALDWIN

Flight Lieutenant John Snowball commanded 2390 (BRA) Squadron for nineteen years until 1989. During this period he was ably assisted by Dr WGF Blair and Miss Hazel Mackintosh. Dr Blair rose through the officer ranks to become Wing Commander of the Northern Ireland Wing. For many years prior to his appointment, Dr Blair was affectionately referred to by his future title. His leadership potential had been foreseen by his colleagues.

In 1988, I joined the Squadron as a Civilian instructor and went on to command the Squadron from 1989 to 2008. During this period, Mr CA Stewart, Miss J Adams, Mr G Clyde and Mr W Thompson also assisted in the running of the Squadron. The decades were packed with cadet activities including flying, gliding, rifle shooting, sports, adventure training and Annual camps.

The Annual camp was the highlight of the training year and was always eagerly looked forward to by cadets – probably not because they had to miss the final week of the Easter term. Camps were based on RAF stations, many of which were historic bases of WW2 and soaked in nostalgia. Cadet accommodation at camps over the years varied from basic tents to well appointed single rooms. Probably the most unusual dormitory was in a hardened nuclear shelter which had to be manned 24 hours a day, with the dire warning never to shut the door. The cadets were convinced that staff had lost the key.

Over the years the aircraft and gliders flown have changed, the rifles improved and the examination subjects have become more technical. However, the enthusiasm and dedication of our cadets remain undiminished. It is through the success and camaraderie of our cadets that 2390 Squadron takes its place with affection and pride in the history of Belfast Royal Academy.