

Jan Sayer (née Reynolds)

English and Drama

1969 to 1972

I remember a lot of the faces in your photos and I do remember Steve Channing as I was in the same class in English and lived in the hostel opposite, with Jan Kingswell, Margo, Fran, and me - Jan Reynolds (now Sayer - ex husband provided that one). I remember Liam and Mercy really well. I was in Old Maids in my first year and then in the hostel just up the hill opposite Kings Head, with the girls. My best friend, Jan Kingswell was in Music so you will remember her beautiful voice and mass of fluffy hair). I was her small, darker friend. I don't have any photos of myself at Bretton, but the one attached to the article is recent and I'm told I've not changed very much. My Mum died when I started my third year and I lived with Marg O'Grady (Art) in Holmfirth, before marrying my first husband and moving to Bradford.



Life led me into the theatre, so goodbye marriage and off I went round the world; ended up as stage manager at Sydney Opera House. Finally burnt out and do slower jobs now while I try to put together a life as a writer. The plan is to return to the UK, but it is harder than it looks.

I heard about Bretton closing from the National Student Drama crowd, as I had been the technical administrator when the Festival was staged at Bretton in the 80s. I can still sing every word of Wild Mountain Thyme.

When I die I shall go to Bretton Hall.

As the song goes: 'all my memories are there'.

I was a poor, plain, country mouse girl in 1969 and my drama teacher suggested I went to Bretton – I'd never heard of it. I was accepted to study English and Drama and arrived in my new world – a cocoon that would hold me while I formed into the person I am now.

I was from an East coast town, a Norfolk dumpling, I knew nothing, but I was clever, brave and friendly and it got me by.

It was a unique, incredible place and it took me a while to get adjusted to being out of the terraced slums. The air finally tasted nice, the Canada geese honked in the field and there were squirrels in the trees. And the world was changing overnight, we had to stop the war in Vietnam, help feed the starving in Africa, go on the pill and try lots of free love and rock and roll. It was the best time to be young. It was 1969 and

all that goes with it – listening to Led Zeppelin on Men's' Main late at night, frightening people as I walked down the haunted Fairy path in my long Afghan coat. Hippy fashion came from Barnsley Market – a new 1930s dress every week for six pence and that shaggy, warm coat that moulted and smelt foul when it was wet.

I had a country girls' skill which helped me get along with all the resident staff – the cleaner fed my goldfish, and her husband woke me one night to see the goats give birth. I once held a baby fox, and fondest of all was the Principal's dog Conker, who jumped in the lake and then jumped on my bed. I can still see the bluebell wood and remember lying down in the bluebells very early one morning and getting very wet.

By the end of my first year, I was breaking out of the cocoon. Glasses replaced by contact lenses, hair below my shoulders and coloured a rich red – country mouse was a beauty and the boys noticed at last.

Artistically there was never a dull moment, classes all day, then folk club or disco. I pulled pints in the Kennel Block bar and posed nude for the art students. Every Thursday we watched Top of the Pops and Star Trek in the communal TV Room – I don't remember watching anything else, there was just too much to do - theatre and poetry and music and walks around those beautiful lakes to the pub up on the hill. At the end of our final year, two students were married in the chapel and I shall remember that day always in spite of the vodka. There were three of us called Jan, with Fran and Margo, and we looked like those wonderful 70s posters in our long dresses with flowers literally in our hair. We all knew we were soon to leave and we all cried. Bretton Hall was in our blood and we were changed forever. I was lucky to go back to Bretton some years after I graduated, as the technical director of National Student Drama Festival and I finally got to sleep in the wonderful mansion rooms overlooking the lake. It was home. .

I never became the English and Drama teacher I started out to be. I went into theatre, travelled the world as a stage manager and ended up at Sydney Opera House. Many of my present friends studied at Bretton Hall, but we didn't meet until much later. Simply being at Bretton is a bond that you share – it simply can't be explained to anyone else.

In Australia, we have a saying –'when you die you go to Bali '.

I shall go to Bretton Hall.

