

Reflections of a Schools Worker

Greetings

Having been on a Sabbatical I've been reflecting on some of the things that have happened during my 20 years of life as a Schools Worker with Scripture Union in Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead, as well as some of the observations I have made, and some of the lessons I have learned. I hope that some who read this may find it helpful and informative, and if appropriate may want to get involved with Schools Work in some way or raise awareness of the opportunities that we can have in our schools today. These reflections will include some stories about the people I have met; indeed it is the 'Reflections of a Schools Worker'. This is something I wanted to do as part of my Sabbatical in order to aid the process of reviewing and reflecting on my journey so far. My thanks go to Rachel Scott for all her help in getting my thoughts into some sort of order. Also, to the hundreds of other people who have helped me on this journey, not just those whom I have known since 1988 when I formally joined Scripture Union as a member of staff, but the people I met before this as well. This includes colleagues, past and present, as well as volunteers I have served with on various events, and everyone at Slough Baptist Church. I would like to give a special mention to two of the pastors who have served at Slough Baptist Church: Keith Moyes and Jem Sewell. Keith and Jem have both shared in chairing my Support Group, but have helped me in so many other ways as well. Finally, thanks go to my wife, Joyce, and son, Chris. Their partnership and support have been vital in making this work happen. It has not always been an easy journey but I am so very thankful and grateful to them.

Most importantly, I thank God for giving me the opportunity to be involved with schools in and around Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead. It has been such a fantastic pleasure and privilege.

I hope you will be encouraged and find this helpful. If it spurs you on to be involved in some way in your local school(s), then that would be just GREAT.

Below are the headings I have chosen:

- **The Beginning**
- **My First Assembly**
- **1983**
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- **The Need**
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- **Some Highlights (The Big Tent event: De-bron, Sports Holiday)**

- **The most significant thing: PRAYER**
 - **Schools Week: The Christmas & Easter Story**
 - **Pressing on**
 - **Networking**
 - **Everyone is involved**
 - **The Common Room**
 - **The Staff Room**
 - **The School Christian Group**
 - **The School Prayer Group**
 - **The Church Connections**
 - **Schools Work is about relationships and flexibility**
 - **Funnies**
 - **Some useful and helpful websites**
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I was asked recently at a Year 11 Retreat Day for St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School, 'don't you get bored of always doing the same thing?' No, I don't – and it's hopefully still fresh for the young people I'm speaking to as well.

The Beginning

I became a Christian while attending the London City Mission Centre in Leytonstone in East London. I was involved here for many years and still have some fantastic memories of learning stories about Jesus, which I now use in schools, and playing lots of sports (I am not as active now but love to watch various sports). The key aspect here was the people who led the groups at the Centre and their genuine love for God and involvement in my story and that of my family. It was a great and significant time.

My First Assembly

My first assembly took place at Tom Hood Senior High School, Leytonstone. Three of us in the Sixth Form wanted to start a Christian group, and to get it going I asked my head of Sixth Form, Mr MacDonald, if I might be able to take an assembly. He agreed, and amongst Sixth Form peers I shared some words, which helped get the group going. It was one of those many 'stepping outside your comfort zone' experiences as I was very aware of my peers. I thank God for his prompting and the opportunity.

1983

1983 was such an important year for me. I was in my final year at school and was sad to be leaving as I LOVED my school days, which is quite helpful now! Spring Harvest was just a few years old and being held at Prestatyn. I'd never heard of it but went along with some others from the London City Mission Centre and it was such an amazing week. I was moved, motivated, challenged and incredibly grateful for those seven days. A London City Mission volunteer, who I believe was called Tania, challenged me about being a Christian and the difference it made in my life. God used her big time. I'd been a Christian for a few years but was really just a passenger. She spoke to me and I was moved by what went on, and felt it was time for change.

One of the things I did that week was to walk through the exhibition area. It was nothing like it is now for any who know Minehead or Skegness, but I picked up a Scripture Union holiday brochure. I had a look at it and thought, 'I'd like to serve on one of these holidays'. I got home, filled in a form, and the process began. I was due to help at an event for 11-14 year olds, but

then saw some information on NFL- a Sports Holiday held at North Foreland Lodge (NFL) in Basingstoke. I asked for my forms to be transferred and turned up expecting to serve on the event at NFL. However, as I was only 18 I was still able to participate in the event as one of the group. My only regret was not having come across this event years earlier!

Leaving school was a big moment for me, and this is why I find this time of year so sad. Usually in the last week of May before half-term, I would be in schools saying 'farewell' to the current Year 13s. Being on sabbatical now this hasn't happened, and I've really missed that. It's a weird feeling because when you go along to these final assemblies and farewell lunches, you are saying 'farewell' to some people you've got to know over the last seven years. The weird thing is that I don't know them that well as I'm just a visitor and not there every day, but I do feel like a part of their lives. The tears stream, the shirts are signed, the messages are written in their leavers books, and the questions that run through my mind are **'What will become of these precious 18 year olds? Where next?'** It's a passing on and letting go and I always find it so sad. Anyway, as you'll read later sometimes you get what I call 'delayed reaction'. See Hayley's story. This is one of many stories that have just blessed my socks off. My school days were great and even though it didn't end how I thought or expected, **Jeremiah 29:11** was real, genuine and helpful for what happened next. **"For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord"**...that's the important part, and I have been holding onto it ever since!

One outcome from Spring Harvest was the prompt and challenge to be baptised. This happened in July 1983 and was very special. I then went to Basingstoke in August for my first Scripture Union holiday, and then in September I moved to Slough, which I had never heard of before coming from East London. I settled in and started a Business Studies course at Slough College and started to go along to Slough Baptist Church, which a couple of friends had mentioned to me. SBC has been my home ever since. This was a key year as so much came from it. I finished my course in 1985, and after a couple of interesting and unsuccessful interviews, I got a job in Maidenhead working in the after sales service department for Seiko Watches. It was great, and then....

The Call

June 1986: I was asked to go into Slough Grammar School to help start a Christian group. Young people often ask me which is my favourite school or if their school is the best. I don't have a favourite school, but Slough Grammar was significant (and scary!) as it was the first school I was invited into, and it started me on my journey. The *best* school of course is the school of life that we are all a part of!

After this prompting came two years of testing what I felt was a call to Schools Work; visits to Langley Grammar and Windsor Girls' Schools, and a sympathetic boss who allowed me to work flexi-time and said **'Wayne, you go off and do your God stuff, as long as you get here for 10.00am'**. This was brilliant as it allowed me to take an assembly without having to take a whole day's holiday for doing so. It allowed some testing of the waters to see if this call was to be pursued, and it provided me with some initial contacts, which were crucial for when I started 2 years later.

Autumn 1987: Scripture Union were running some promotional vision events entitled 'There's Another Kind of Famine'. I managed to get along to four in Reading, Purley and a couple of other places. They were brilliant evenings, and during one in particular I was asked to share my involvement with Scripture Union as a volunteer. I spoke about my involvement as a team member of the Sports Holiday, and I heard more about the ministry of Scripture Union and listened to Judy Wilson (nee Brandon), who was a Schools Worker for the South East (yes, we had regional workers in those days). She had visited some of the local schools here, so when I started again with Scripture Union as a full time Schools Worker her invaluable experience allowed me to build on her contacts.

I shared everything that was going on with my Minister, Keith Moyes, telling him about the call to Schools Work that I felt God was laying on my heart. Keith was very supportive and encouraging, and asked me to share my thoughts with the church Deacons. This experience was interesting, scary and necessary. Once this was done, it was time to test the water with the wider local churches; another HUGE and scary challenge and experience, but again, crucial and very necessary. Barriers arose as this was new and different, and it seemed as though we were heading for a dead end. We had an open meeting in the autumn of 1987 to discuss what was going on. This went well but it still felt like there more questions came from it than answers.

Crunch time came in January 1988 at another open meeting at St Paul's Church in Slough. If my going into Schools Work was going to happen, then this event was vital. Who would come? Would there be sufficient interest? Thankfully, there was. The next stage was to re-connect with Scripture Union, and I was called for interview in May 1988. A scary panel of five people interviewed me. They themselves were not scary, but the experience was! After some interesting dialogue and questions I was asked to leave the room and await the verdict! General Director David Cohen came down on his way out of City Road where our HQ was and gave me the thumbs up. I was appointed, subject to sufficient team support coming in from the Christians and churches of the area. The challenge was on, and on the 25th June leaflets were distributed around the local churches inviting people to respond and share in this opportunity. I remember this day for a number of reasons: Firstly, Holland beat Russia 2-0 in the European Championships' final with a 'wonder goal' from Marco Van Basten. Check it out if you like football! Secondly, a few years later on this date, Joyce and I got married. I had kept my boss at work informed as to where things might lead in September 1988 so that I could formally hand in my notice as early as possible once we had sufficient response from the local churches. I was due to leave at the end of July having had three great years working there. I loved my time in that job; there were some great people and memories, works dos and social events, soccer matches and laughter. My final day there was one of the most moving days of my life which I will never forget. Churches' response continued through the summer, and with HUGE thanks to those who served (and still do serve) on the Support Group, we were up and running!

The Need

People are looking for purpose, meaning and significance. An observation of mine is that the face of the typical young person and the front that is displayed can often be one of 'I'm OK'. However, underneath there is an aching and a longing that is often hidden.

'**Make My Kids Happy**' was a fascinating experiment in which a dozen teenage guys and girls from a school in Blackpool were asked to give up things like mobile phones, ipods and make up for a month (it was known as 'Bin the Bling') to see what effect it would have on them. 'Will the simple life improve their self worth?' 'Are the trappings of modern life making our children happy?' These were some of the questions being looked at. The teenagers did a survey both before and after the experiment, looking at issues like self-esteem. It was fascinating to see it develop and to discover the issues that came up in school, amongst parents and siblings, and outside of school. The conclusion from the experiment was that the participants' self esteem and self worth actually improved without all the gadgets and 'bling' being a part of their childhoods and adolescence. It was a great two part programme which is very worthwhile watching. It is great to listen to the accounts of the young people involved, their parents, their Headteacher and especially their peers who were not involved in the actual experiment.

It has always been my belief, with or without this recent programme, that while Jesus may not be highest on the agenda for most young people, if we can get beneath the 'front', there might just be something we can contribute. Actually, I am convinced there is, and this motivates me. What greater message can there be than that God loves us just as we are (with or without all the 'bling')? That God accepts us just as we are (with or without 'bling')? And that God has plans for us, we were made by him, for him, and he can be what we are looking for? **That's the need, that's the motivation; that's the task for us as we seek to make a difference in this**

generation. Psalm 78:4 says “we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deed of the Lord, his power and the wonders he has done”. This is a key verse for us in Scripture Union both now and through recent years.

The Aim

‘Making Jesus Known’. It’s short and simple, and every other strap line, key verse, motto text and anything else I could suggest can be reduced to this. Currently our phrase in Scripture Union is **Proclaiming Jesus – Inspiring Leaders – Equipping Christians and Enabling Growth**, and we aim to do this TOGETHER with the local churches; Christians and other Christian organisations working in partnership.

Why Bother with Schools Work?

This is a very fair question and worthwhile asking from time to time. My suggested answer would be: It’s where most children and young people are. Here are some helpful and useful statistics and facts:

- In 1904 **56%** of children and young people went to church
 - Today that figure has dropped to only **4%**
 - **39%** of churches have no one under the age of 11
 - **49%** have no one between 11-14
 - **59%** have no one between 15-19
 - **99%** of children & young people are in school
 - **80%** of those who become Christians do so before the age of **18** (See Hayley’s story below)
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- It seems to me from this that schools are a great place to be involved. Actually, wherever people are seems to be a good place to be, for example colleges and universities (big respect to the ministries of people like UCCF, Fusion, Festive etc).
 - However, let’s not forget the **4%** of our children and young people who are in our churches as they play a crucial role in our schools. It seems to me that part of our role in churches is to equip and encourage, enthuse and enable, motivate and move such folk to share Jesus appropriately where they spend most of their time – in school.
 - Actually, for all Christians in church I trust that we can be equipped and enabled to share Jesus wherever we are.

Encouragement file: Hayley’s story

Hayley’s story: I use this as an example of the influence that we can potentially have in our schools – with a reminder of two important things: **1. It is God who changes lives and we would do well to remember this. 2. It can take time...a long time...sometimes we’ll never even know.** I would not have known about Hayley had we not bumped into each other a few years back. Even if I hadn’t bumped into her, what drives me is the following saying: **‘God hasn’t called us to be successful, but faithful’.** This I believe is a quote from Mother Teresa.

Newlands School: 8 Years On and a ‘New Creation’

I always look back positively on my years at Newlands; it was a great school and I was very happy there. I enjoyed learning, making friends with the teachers and thankfully had many friends of my own age as well!

My attitude towards Christianity at that time was that it was the religion I claimed to belong to when identifying myself on administrative forms – I would ask my Mum, “What do I put?” and she would say “C. of E.” (Church of England)

I did believe in God (though I didn’t often think about Jesus) and sometimes I prayed ‘security prayers’ before I went to sleep, particularly if something bad was happening and was out of my control. I thought that doing this and saying those things was sufficient to be able to claim I was a Christian.

Not having been brought up in a Christian family however, and falsely believing that just saying that I was a Christian was enough to make me one, it came as a shock when on my gap year - volunteering in a Christian-run orphanage in Hong Kong - I suddenly came across girls my own age who really were Christians! These young women lived and breathed and shared their faith in a living God and a real Saviour with me daily. Not in a pushy way, but in ways like saying that they would pray for me before a night shift duty, inviting me to church and the young adults group, and loving me and each other in such a gentle way that I couldn’t help but be moved by it.

Over the 8 months I spent in Hong Kong, God was drawing me near to Him and softening my heart, and bit by bit I opened up to the gospel. I started attending the young adults’ meeting with my new friends. Then I went to their church, and then to outreach events, and then someone bought me my own Bible which I began to read. Eventually I knew that all of it was true and that I believed in Jesus and what He had done for me on the cross – that I could now have eternal life with Him as he had paid for my sins! One Sunday I went to the front of the church during the service and they prayed for me and I knew I had taken that first big step by outwardly showing that I was now a believer! I was baptised in the South China Sea a few weeks later and days before I was due to leave Hong Kong for home. This time when I got to England, I really would be able to say ‘I’m a Christian!’

Since becoming a Christian I have completed an English degree at Aberystwyth University in Wales, been the Prayer Secretary for a student Christian society, been back to volunteer in Hong Kong, been the leader of a young adults home group and have been privileged to do three months’ Christian mission work in Bolivia – God has been keeping me busy!

I often enjoy looking back over my ‘non-Christian’ years and discovering the different ways that God had been involved in my life all along and how He’d used people and events to influence me for His Kingdom, all of which culminated in me coming to believe in Christ when I was in Hong Kong.

One of those good influences for God’s work in me was definitely the Scripture Union School’s Worker, who used to come in and take assemblies at our school, and who was often seen at Sports Days and other key events on the school calendar. Even my old school friends who are not Christians, but who I still keep in touch with, were positively influenced by Wayne and whenever he comes up in conversation today they always speak very highly of him and the assemblies that he lead.

School assemblies were usually a challenge for us Newlands teenagers, as they were early enough in the morning for us to still be just waking up properly, and if they weren’t led with enthusiasm and gusto by whichever poor soul had been elected to take them, it just resulted in extra time to bite your fingernails, find funny phrases in the hymn books and to spot the pupils with ballet experience by the way their rod-straight backs stood out among the stooped shoulders of everyone else sitting cross-legged on the hard floor!

So, whenever Wayne, our Scripture Union Schools Worker came in and took an assembly, it was always a welcome refreshment and we'd often find that what he said and how he delivered it would leave us with things to think about during the rest of the week. I have a fond memory of Wayne delivering a rap about Jesus to us one day, which a student from another school had invented for him during an R.E. lesson. Everyone also remembers him doing hilarious impressions of his mum saying his name over the phone in her strong Jamaican accent. But the great thing, looking back, was that there was real treasure and soul-food (God's powerful Word!) communicated amidst the humorous delivery. I remember that whenever Wayne would talk about Jesus and would teach us about one of the parables in the Bible, he would often act out the events with real skill and enthusiasm and it just made all things Christian and "religious" that much more accessible to us sceptical teens, who were always worried about damaging their 'self-image.' Everyone liked the Schools Worker and the things he had to teach us, and so it was cool to enjoy those assemblies and talk about them afterwards as the highlight of a typical day at school.

Perhaps I won't fully know the extent to which our Schools Worker lead me nearer to accepting the good news about Jesus until I meet the Lord in Heaven and can ask Him myself. However, I do know how much I appreciate the fact that Wayne was a well-recognised, shining face for Christ in our school, that he was always approachable, that he spoke God's life-changing Word to us and that he was praying for us behind the scenes.

Now, with hindsight and with a passion myself to see children and young people coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I am even more grateful that the doors are currently still open for Christian Schools Workers to go in and be a light in the very confused and often dark and difficult lives of so many school children and teachers today.

In response, it makes me want to pray more, that our government and culture don't become so 'politically correct' that they ban these great opportunities altogether, and it also makes me want to support Scripture Union and its Schools Workers by whatever means God gives me, be it through encouragement, involvement, or financially.

God bless Wayne and all the Schools Workers - long may this great ministry continue to bear fruit! Thank you Lord!

Hayley McIlroy

I shared this story because it shows a process of time. Hayley didn't respond and become a Christian after my first assembly when she was in Year 7. Nor when Elizabeth Pearce, the RE teacher, shared her faith in Jesus through being a Christian teacher in her school. This lesson is one of a **jigsaw; team work**. Those named, and maybe others unnamed, each playing their part. Others were involved, but it still took time, and for me the great part is what she is now doing. She is an example of a changed life over a number of years. I thank God for her and even if nothing else happened before or after this would all have been worthwhile. Thank you Jesus! There have been some other people who have similar stories to share and many others who aren't (yet?) Christians but who continue on their journey. Just a point to re-iterate: **It is our God who changes lives...and by his grace he chooses us to play a part**. One further observation from this is that before Hayley became a Christian she had a positive view and experience of Christians while she was at school. This is important.

‘How do we measure success in Schools Work?’

I struggle with this, I really do. Suffice to say that the above story would be a help, but it's not always the case. A question I would ask is 'What is success?' My suggested answer in 'Reflections of a Schools Worker' would be that success comes through being faithful in going into our schools. We can share Jesus with those present, pray that the many who are not Christians might listen and might be interested, and that those who are Christians might be encouraged, helped, supported and affirmed. It's not brief, it's not punchy, it's not succinct, but it's what I think. I think it is the Engle scale that mentions something like people are on a journey from $-x$ to 0 to $+x$. If people move from left to right with the right being where Jesus is, then we are going in the right direction.

Key lesson: ‘Be you, yourself and no one else’

Probably one of the most important pieces of advice I give to anyone involved in school, children, youth, church...and it actually applies across the board in whatever we do. Let's listen, learn and observe from each other, but **be you, yourself and no one else**.

The Commissioning Service

‘What will you export from Slough?’ – 31st October 1988. In January this year I was involved in St Bernard's School's Year 11 Discipleship Day. It is a brilliant annual event that I've shared in from time to time, and on this occasion one of the others involved was a woman who had taken part in the Commissioning Service we had for this work back in 1988. I listened to the tape recently, and among the many challenges that still ring true from this evening 20 years ago was **‘What will you export from Slough?’** In my own response, I'd suggest it's been Schools Week – Easter & Christmas presentations held at church for local schools. While I valued and appreciated these occasions and some similar events in 1991, 96, and 2005, my conclusion based on Matthew 28 and the great commission is that we are all commissioned for service wherever we are, and that God has placed us. It is a team ministry and a body ministry and each of us has a **key part** to play in a variety of ways wherever we are. This is a valuable and good lesson that I have learned over time. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you ALWAYS” Matthew 28: 19-20. Glory!!!!

Tragedies

What can you say, when words are not enough? The toughest aspect of being a Schools Worker for me has been those times when tragedy has struck a school community. I don't think you can ever be prepared for such a time. When they come as they have, it's rough and tough. It may be like in 1996 when I was asked by a mum to speak at the funeral of her daughter, who had died following a long illness. The many funerals where the tears have streamed as hundreds have mourned the loss of a friend. ‘Why did God allow this?’ is a question that has been asked, and there is no real, genuine or satisfying answer to this. The ‘WHY’ remains. What I have learned on these extreme occasions is to be silent; to just be there, and if appropriate to offer some words of comfort. The fragility of life...

The First Term

I always encourage new workers to **spend the first term observing, visiting, reading and learning, as opposed to doing**. Why? Well, the doing will come. I was already in the Slough area, settled in a local church and knew a little about the local schools when I started working for Scripture Union. However, many Schools Workers may be starting in a new area and having to find a church to be grounded in as well as everything else. I really appreciated the advice and the opportunity to just observe, and then the doing came. There was reading, conferences, visiting others, thinking, and that all helped towards getting going in January 1989. The problem

was, and is still, **wanting to make an immediate impression**, which is understandable. I would suggest the following advice: 'be', 'not do'. Observe and learn, rather than getting your hands dirty too early. It all contributes to the action that will follow. Communicating this to others involved may be the tricky bit, but here it is for what it's worth.

On my first day with SU I travelled to Harrow, where our regional office was – it was a Thursday, and it took me ages to get there as I got lost! However, when I did arrive it was nice to meet up with some southeast colleagues and start to get a feel of SU in the southeast. Harrow will be celebrating 25 years of ministry in September and if possible I hope to get along to that event. That's another sign of some long established ministries on various areas around the country. In fact, ministry has been going on ever since schools started, as there have always been Christians in our schools. As I have often said, been reminded of and continue to be reminded of – that's where the Christian ministry is really at.

There was the initial letter to the schools. The **lesson learned** here is to follow up any correspondence. I learned that most Head teachers never saw the introductory letter I sent as they would have been shielded from it. I didn't follow anything up, as not hearing from them made me think they were not interested, and to call would be too pushy which just isn't me. My advice now is to drop a letter or an e-mail and after say two weeks if there is no reply, make a courtesy call. At least then you know if the school is interested or not. I thank God that I already had contacts from the previous two years before I joined SU so had a place to start. The rest trickled from word of mouth and relationships which is so important.

The first school I visited was Altwood in December 1988. I remember it well, especially the informal chat with the Sixth Formers in their Common room when I did the 'official lunch time follow up'. Those Sixth Formers will be in their late thirties now. I often wonder 'where are they now?'

I was then part of a team at ERNYX (New Year holiday in Cambridge which was brilliant) and that was the end of my first term with SU.

The Schools

WOW. What it is all about. What a fantastic privilege. Primary, secondary, first, middle, senior, special and private schools. There have been so many, and I thank God for each one. Some have closed, some merged or changed name, and some have grown. I have so many great memories of the people I've met in each of them. The priority has been local secondary schools, but I have learnt a lot from the occasional opportunities visiting others.

Assemblies

When I was at primary school in East London I remember my Headteacher, Mr Windsor, taking assemblies and using large drawings as illustrations. They were like the outlines in the Good News Bible, only bigger. Assemblies are where you can make an '**impression**' on a large group of people that can be built on elsewhere, as well as being 'stand alone' (Hanging Around Ministries!). What drives this is the opportunity to give the listeners and watchers something of what Jesus said and did that still makes a connection TODAY. You start with where they are at and take them to where you want them to be! They are scary and nerve racking experiences STILL but I do love them; I've found them to be a platform. Despite the many changes over the years in terms of frequency and the other aspects that are perhaps placing assemblies more on the fringe of school life, it is great that they are still being used by so many visitors contributing to this part of school life and making a difference. I have been encouraged.

In the early days most schools had some sort of assembly everyday. Today that has changed significantly from maybe one assembly a week for a year group or part of a school, to 'nothing' for days. Exam season is a particular example especially because halls are useful venues for

exams, meaning that assemblies are either shifted or cancelled. It is very difficult to get the whole school together in one place. It is more common now to find year group, lower or senior school, or house assemblies becoming more familiar in more schools. FLEXIBILITY is vital here for adapting to the on-going changes. 30 years ago, Youth for Christ started work in Waltham Forest, and recently they celebrated this fact. I can still remember their first two workers coming into my school to do an assembly. School workers really do make an impact and leave an impression.

I have some other observations: Assembly teams. When I started working for SU I remember one church group, Plan A from the River Church in Maidenhead, having a team going into schools and doing some great work. Today this continues with all sorts of combinations: 'Open the Book' is one that is developing around here and making a great impression. What I like about this is the flexibility of the project, and the fact that it is developing people to make a significant contribution over a consistent period of time. Every Thursday, or whatever day it is, a team will come in and do an assembly. It sticks, is very worthwhile and I trust it will continue while we still have the opportunities.

Lessons

What I like most about the lesson times in schools is the opportunity to have more time with a smaller group than an assembly, and that can lead to more being accomplished. Lessons are another way of 'being stretched' as you aim to share something of Jesus in an appropriate way as part of the RE or PSHE (Personal & Social Education) Curricula. PSHE involves looking at issues like bullying, racism, sex and relationships, euthanasia and abortion. All real life subjects for teenagers. RE takes on some of the above and mixes in miracles, parables and the rest. This is where resources like 'Into the Bible' (www.scriptureunion.org.uk/intothebible) and colleagues, as well as music, TV and magazines have all played their part. Take music, for example: 'Shackles' by Mary Mary was released a few years ago, and is basically about Acts 16 and Paul and Silas being in prison and their chains falling off. This has come as a surprise to those who have heard this and has been a wonderful opportunity to make a **connection between the world of the teenager and the Word of God**. 'Perfect Gentleman' by Wycliff Jean is about the woman caught in adultery in John 8. Black Eyed Peas - 'Where is the Love?' has loads of material here from John 15:13 to the title itself, all sorts of 'LOVE' them and so much more. A lot of mileage has been gained from this song and I love it! I think that what has probably been my favourite use of song was Shaggy's massive number one hit from 2000, 'It Wasn't Me'. This song is relevant to the story of David & Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 and Psalm 51. This last one is not primarily about this story, but as you listen the link is there. Music and lyrics are very powerful today, and from time to time a song comes out that just lends itself to school and you can make it happen. Another resource I'd like to mention here is www.schoolswork.co.uk. Check it out, make it known, and please do pass it on.

Question Time

There is nothing like the power of testimony. One of the reasons for this is that it is your story, so can't really be argued with. From time to time with Year 10's (14/15 year olds) and others there's the chance to chat and ask any questions (there has been many an interesting question here). Usually it starts with your story, and then it's open. I have found these times tremendously rewarding; being able to talk about how I became a Christian, what I do and why is absolutely fantastic.

Hangin' Around Ministry (HAM)

This is about the 'flexible' side of Schools Work. In the early years, assemblies were followed up by what I call 'fixed' lunch time sessions. Example: at the end of an assembly I'd say something like, "if anyone is interested in anything that's been mentioned today, then at lunchtime today I'll be in Room 5 to follow this up". The reason behind this is to pick up in some way what has

happened and to show that it has a role. It worked to a certain extent, as those who wanted to know more would come. The downside is that you sometimes just never know whether what you have said has made an impact. So, one day at Desborough, there I was in Room 5 at lunch time, and I waited and waited but no one came. Then, just before the end of lunch a lad came in and wanted to chat. We did, and as he left he said "by the way, some of my friends wanted to come but felt embarrassed because of friends". This kind of 'formal' follow up wasn't working, and also wasn't good practice. This realisation made me try to think of another way. How about if I just turned up at lunch time and wandered around? Would that work and be useful? I stepped out in faith, and yes, it worked. Now, I have to say that it wasn't easy at first. It's tricky to explain this to others but it has certainly worked since then. I've found it to be a 'win-win' situation. By being in school people are more willing to chat in the context of the school hall, dining area and outside, so the conversations still happen, but this method eliminates the embarrassment factor of saying 'I'm going to Room 5'. The formal follow up still happens occasionally. If a school is starting a Christian Group and it's mentioned in assembly then I will say something like "the group will start today at lunchtime in Room 5. If you have questions about this or it isn't as clear as it could be – do get in touch and I'd be happy to explain more". For me, 'HAM' has now become an essential ingredient of Schools Work that has many spins offs, which can be seen in other ways.

'Examattack'

Examattack started in 1991 to help 5th Year pupils (now Year 11 or 15/16 year olds) prepare for their GCSE exams. At that time it was just for GCSE or A levels. Now it's for SAT's, 'AS' levels, and pretty much every year group that is facing important exams. If you're interested, the talk, slide show, recording and more is available here if you know of others facing exams who might find this useful: www.examattack.org.uk

The Zach Rap

"**I want to tell you about a man who collected tax**" is the start of this rap that has been used hundreds of times over the years in church, school, open air, mission and more. It tells the story of Zacchaeus from Luke 19:1-10, and has been a favourite thing to share in the assembly hall and classroom. Great thanks to Dani, Nicki and Katie for writing it; it is still being used 18 years later!

The Potential of the Residential

FANTASTIC! The main events that I've had the privilege to serve on and lead are Sports Holiday (NFL), Action Replay and Get Real! There are many, many GREAT stories that could be told here. For now I will say that we can **NEVER underestimate the potential of the residential**, both for the immediate and for the delayed reaction. My biggest thrill is seeing people come to faith at such events, and seeing some of these people then move on and serve in future years on these and other events. I have a picture in my office of 5 such folk, taken at Get Real! in 2006: Dave, Lois, Jo, Rachel & David. This photo serves as a constant reminder of the grace, power and love of our God. Might you know someone aged 8-19 who might like to attend one this summer or New Year or next Easter? Might you know someone who might to serve on one of these opportunities? See www.scriptureunion.org.uk/holidays or www.scriptureunion.org.uk/countmein for various options and opportunities in the UK and overseas, available for different lengths of time. I can THOROUGHLY recommend this.

When things went wrong!

In 1991, I was 'thrown' out of a school due to a misunderstanding. It's a long story, and one that represents a personal low point for me. Everything was eventually sorted out, but it just goes to show that things sometimes can and do go wrong!

Some Highlights:

The Big Tent Event (1991) and De-Bron (1992):

The Big Tent Event was a mission event in Gerrards Cross organised by the local churches who invited a team from Scripture Union to work with them. It was FANTASTIC. Just recently I visited one of the churches involved, St James, and met some people who were involved back in 1991. One of the great things was seeing the churches **working together in partnership**. It was brilliant. It was aimed at all ages, having specific events for the different age groups. It was where the Zach rap was first used!

De-Bron was the International Scripture Union Conference held every few years and on this occasion in 1992 it was held in Holland. I was privileged to be there and it was a very powerful and moving experience, seeing brothers and sisters from numerous countries involved with some amazing opportunities across the world. This was another brilliant experience.

Sports Holiday (1983)

I turned up in Basingstoke at North Foreland Lodge and had 10 wonderful days with some amazing people. This was the beginning of Scripture Union residentials that have had a maaahhuussive impact on me. I was invited to join the team the following year and had the fantastic privilege of serving every year until 2001, which then led to Get Real! starting in 2002.

The most SIGNIFICANT thing - PRAYER

I met Doris a few years ago at Langley Free Church Woman's meeting. What a lovely, lovely lady. She lived opposite Langley Grammar School and said "before, I saw schools as a bit of a nuisance – now I see them as a topic for prayer", and that's how she used them for many years. Sadly she is no longer with us, but there are many people like Doris around in our churches who have a real heart and prayer ministry for our schools and I'm very grateful for them.

Pause to Pray was something I started in 2001. It has been really encouraging to know that each month I can send out an e-mail which has some items for prayer and praise and then list some diary dates of upcoming events. (Paper copies are available for those who prefer, or who do not have access to e-mail). Knowing that people are receiving this, are being kept informed, and can use the items listed in a variety of ways is a great help and reinforces the point of the significance of prayer. It complements the more general termly newsletter, which provides feedback and the like to those who receive it.

Schools Week: The Christmas & Easter Story

The most celebrated event we have each year is Christmas; the most SIGNIFICANT event we have is Easter. These two Schools Week events have been just amazing over the years. See www.sloughbaptistchurch.org.uk/schoolsweek and www.scriptureunion.org.uk/62365.id. The most recent encouragement is from Jen Roberston in Hamilton, a fellow Scripture Union worker. It was really encouraging to read about how Jen has adapted what we use here in Slough up in Lanarkshire so that it reflects more of the Scottish Education system, and she is wanting to make this more widely available for churches there so that others can make it happen. She has put together a package and is planning to make Schools Week more widely available for fellow workers and churches to use at Christmas and Easter. This is fantastic. It's the most significant thing I've been involved with in my time with Scripture Union, and it all started as a one off event celebrating the Centenary of my home church, Slough Baptist Church, in 1994. That initial event went well, and off the back of that, Rev. Jem Sewell and I started a more regular event for Slough, and now 15 years later it's happening in around 30 locations from Altrincham to Woodley; Gravesend to Glasgow, for around 11,000 pupils. That's why it's been so significant and reminds me again of the challenge shared in October 1988 at my Commissioning Service: 'What will you export from Slough?' I could mention Vicki & Matt in Wales, Heather & Andrea in

Reading, Hilary in Heathrow, and many others who have taken this on in their respective areas. This has been not just the most significant thing, but also the most satisfying for me.

Pressing on

'Being confident of this that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus', Philippians 1:6. This verse really encourages me. Our God continues to be at work in us and through us.

Networking

I was at a church in High Wycombe a few years back to speak, and the notices were given about a really good event happening the following Saturday. I thought: if only I'd know about this event, I would have loved to go along. Probably others too around the area might have been interested. The response to this became the 'What's On?' e-mail that is sent out to people working with children and young people in and around the area. The e-mail covers events, training, resources and 'other', and means that each recipient can see at a glance just some of what is happening, and if it's appropriate for them or others in their church, they can find out more and respond. It is not as exhaustive as it can be but it has enabled far more people from many more churches to be informed of things that hopefully are helpful. It is self-selecting, as I put in the information that people send me and other things I come across from colleagues about what we are doing in Scripture Union. I also add information from other organisations I come across, as well as from the Youthwork Magazine. If you'd like to be added to the list, e-mail me or see the website where it is updated from time to time. It is better to hear about something twice than not at all, and at the heart of it all, it's about **sharing ideas and resources, not re-inventing the wheel and networking.**

Taster of it:

"If you have any events related to children / young people / leaders (over the next few months) that you know about or are hosting, or any new resources that you think others would benefit from knowing about, then please let me know and I'll put them together for the next update which will be on the web www.examattack.org.uk/whatson in June. The key information to include is:

- * **Name of the event / resource / training course**
- * **When & where**
- * **Cost (if applicable)**
- * **Contact name, 'phone number, e-mail address, website address**
- * **Anything else you think necessary**

Most recent Youth Leader Network monthly e-mail or on the web:
www.examattack.org.uk/whatson

Everyone is involved

I've just seen a story on www.schoolswork.co.uk and think that it is a reminder that Schools Work is about much, much more than Schools Workers. I've mentioned elsewhere that God can use us just where we are, in the ordinary. For many that is the school gate and this is just one example of how we can build relationships. This particular story is about a mum who stands at the school gate every day, and about her 'being there' for two specific occasions when another mum is looking for someone to confide in. It's a brilliant story and yet oh so typical. Check this link to go directly to the piece: <http://schoolswork.co.uk/blog/entry/a-parents-mission-field/>

The Common Room

The Common Room is possibly the most relaxing place to be in a school. It's Sixth Form territory. I thought that when AS levels were introduced a few years ago the common rooms would be empty. No, no, no. It is the place to be for chat, music, games, study, birthday cake, and much more. Again, one needs great wisdom and sensitivity here. Recently I popped into one common room and made a quick about turn as a member of staff let rip on the students. I got the signal that now was not an appropriate time for 'hanging around'. I found out later that this had been down to the teacher and this was not usual. I wasn't to know that as I always want to be making sure I'm on the right side of the school life. How it works for me is, if it's a lunch time, I pop in before the bell and catch up with whoever is around. The bell rings and then it can get quite busy or full so I will go elsewhere and connect with other areas of the school. At the end of lunch, if appropriate, I may pop back in to the common room. It's also a good place to be just after an assembly, especially if the Sixth Formers have just been in it. It's open season and whether it's the news of the day, exam season, leavers prom to sort (I love those occasions which have just been picked up here in the last couple of years in terms of the schools) or something else. The best times are when the discussion focuses on Jesus. What I find is that because of the relaxed nature of **their territory** we can chat, discuss, and debate the issues. There is respect. I don't have the bible behind my back and my opening sentence is not **'Have you been washed in the blood of the lamb?'** as that isn't too well received. Two occasions in the common room spring to mind. The first took place after a lesson I had been doing. It was break time, so I went to the common room at Langley Grammar. It was packed, but at the end of break and for the next hour three or four students and I chewed the fat on all things. I came away thinking 'that's what it's all about'. The second occasion was back in 1989 at Altwood. It was Christmas time, and something similar to the time at Langley Grammar took place. There have also been numerous times at Furze Platt, Newlands, Desborough and Windsor Girls, where the common room has been a place where people really get to grips with all of life's issues. Those times have been amongst the highlights of being in school; unpredictable, unplanned, but significant.

The Staff Room

'I'm a Schools Worker, get me out of here!' I love staff rooms...now. But this has not always been the case. I turned up once to a school for some 'HAM' (Hanging Around Ministry), popped into the staff room and was greeted by staff in unusual attire...it was an INSET day (a Training Day, so there were no pupils around). It was lunch time, so I stayed and had the most amazing chat with some of the staff and one teacher in particular who I've probably spoken to most over the 20 years that I've been on staff, and still on going. Whether or not they are closer to God I do not know, but whether they are open to God, yes, yes, yes. When I started as a Schools Worker I had a phobia of the staff room from not being a teacher. It was 'alien' territory and the like so I stayed away. I'm ok now, and often if in school at break time, staff will still say 'come to the staff room for a coffee'. I decline because I'd prefer to be out with the young people. So staff room time now is before school /assembly, before and after break, and before and after lunch. Often we talk 'until the cows come home' and cover a fair range of topics. It's a balancing act as they are working so one needs genuine wisdom and sensitivity. Overall I've found that in the schools where this happens it is just so worth it. It takes time to develop, but is just the most fantastic privilege. So now I say **'I'm a Schools Worker, get me in here!'** This is all part of the diet of being a Schools Worker. Glory!!!!

The School Christian Group

I have found it very interesting to see what is happening here currently. Last year we launched schoolslive (www.schoolslive.org.uk). It is brilliant that in just a few months, 1200 primary and secondary school groups have registered and are making use of this wonderful free resource to help support the variety of people who lead such groups. **Please make this known** and check it out for yourself if you are not already aware of it. When I started working with SU, lunchtimes were much longer; today they are very short and in some cases don't really exist. I've just been

reading a very interesting article in 'Secondary Teachers' magazine entitled 'So What's Yours Like?', where a teacher describes a typical break time in the staff room. This article was fascinating and true. What this has resulted in is a need for groups to be creative and flexible. For example, it is perhaps better not to meet at lunch time, but after school or before school.

What are the groups for? My own view is that they are a very helpful and useful facility for the schools that have them. They work best when the initiative and drive for them comes from those already within the school, as opposed to those outside. Another great moment in schools has been when I've been approached by people wanting to start a group. Most recently this was in Windsor Girls' and it has been just fantastic to develop this over the past year, and it all came from the drive and initiative of Jess & Kathryn.

I remember a lass many years ago apologising to me, saying 'Wayne I can't go to the group because it's on at the same time as choir'. My main role with groups has been to encourage and support schools that have them, and pop along from time to time to help resources, but not to have 'hands on' involvement because of other things. I encouraged this girl to sing with the choir. Her heart was with God, she had a beautiful voice and that's where she could be. A potential danger with groups is that they become a 'holy huddle'. Part of that is OK as it can be such an oasis of support for our young Christians in a place where they spend so much time, but it is not the be all and end all, especially if our young Christians are involved with local churches. However, I know that this isn't always the case. A school Christian group can range from being just for Christians, or for non-Christians being run by Christians. Most operate between these two, where anyone can come along and get involved, and it can and does have an effect.

The School Prayer Group

Currently we have the Pray for Schools initiative, involving a number of Christian organisations (Care, Schools Prayer Network, Youth for Christ, New Generation, Churches Together and Scripture Union), and are helping to encourage and stimulate prayer for our schools. This is a fantastic initiative. It works alongside Education Sunday in the spring and Schools PrayDay in November. One of my regular sound bites is '**prayer is the MOST significant contribution we can make to our schools**'. When I think of parents over the years who have initiated such groups, usually for a short season, it has been just superb. It has worked because it has come from within. My thought is that getting the mentality of wherever we spend most of our time is where our main ministry is. Perhaps in the past the focus has been too much on the worker or visitor or church leader, to the detriment of those there all the time. We need both and if we didn't call it prayer for school but just prayer, it would encapsulate everyone. We all need prayer to be who God wants us to be where he has placed us: home, school, church, the office, the factory, overseas and 'other'. Again, do check out www.schoolsprayernetwork.org.uk, www.prayday.eu, and www.educationsunday.org and make use if appropriate.

The Church Connections

This is a tricky one and I am still learning on this one. Very rarely do I have young people (or staff) come up to me in school and say 'yes, I'd really like to go along to church'. You may be familiar with Back to Church Sunday (www.backtochurch.co.uk ; check this out). It's not primarily your church, but church in general. Last year, hundreds went back to church for the first time, and over recent years this has worked and a good percentage have stayed. In my experience, I'd encourage a young person ideally to attend somewhere local, and hopefully with peers or friends they know. Many years ago, two teenagers went on a Scripture Union holiday with no church background. There's another story here. I was contacted to see if I could suggest a local church for them. I made contact with them in their school and encouraged them to go to a local church. The result was that they decided not to attend, which is fine, but the mechanism was there. On the rare occasions when people have asked me about church, I have encouraged them to find somewhere local, and I have sometimes invited people I know to my own church. Most say 'no', which is real and discouraging. However, occasionally others say 'yes'. Glory!

Church is so important but should not be made a stumbling block or the be all and end all, as we still have a journey to make as we try to make the bridge shorter without changing or compromising the message. That's the challenge.

I saw Sister Act recently (not the new stage show in London but the original film from the 90's), and it was fantastic! I loved it, and I can tell you, when I watch it I think 'yeah'. If you get a chance to see it then please do so, and ask yourself the question, '**What can we learn from this that is applicable to our church and our community?**' I think that there is something we can all learn! Enjoy it too. Sister Act II makes me cry EVERY time I see it, but that's another story!

Church has been absolutely essential and crucial in my life. Scripture Union could not survive without working in partnership with the local churches that have the people, gifts, ideas and resources that make so much of what we are about happen. I guess that this is also true of most other Christian charities. I loved the opportunity to go and be involved with other churches and to speak to them, and during my sabbatical, to visit some and observe, learn and see what goes on.

Question: If your church did a survey of the local community, asking the questions, 'If you were to come along to church, when would be a suitable time?' and if the answer that came back was on a different time and day to when your church normally meets – what would you do and why?

I listened to a talk by Andy Croft from Soul Survivor on the web about the church and it was great. Check it out if you'd like to, at www.soulsurvivor.com. While on the topic of the church, I would highly recommend www.wymad.org.uk, and in particular a video clip entitled 'The Next Generation'. It is hard hitting and I think very helpful for us when thinking about both the present and the next 10 years in terms of Christian children and young people in our churches. It asks some BIG questions that come right from the heart of a group of children and young people. 50,000 copies of the DVD have been made and have gone out. If you've not seen it or heard of it, please do ask me for more information. It could make a significant difference.

How do we handle the contrast between the big event (New Wine, Spring Harvest, Soul Survivor, Newday, Scripture Union holidays etc) and the coming back to the real world? In 1982 I went on a London City Mission holiday to Wales. I was a fantastic week. We came back on the coach singing and dancing (well, not dancing on the coach!) and suddenly we hit London. It was a Saturday and what we saw, what I saw, was sadness, glumness and the like. It hit us all hard, and me for the first time. However, it was REAL. Where we had been was what I like to call '**a taste of heaven**', but back home it is so much harder. This is a massive question to ask, but a genuine one, and we would do well to prepare ourselves and our young people who enjoy such events in their thousands every year for such a contrast.

Schools Work is about relationships & flexibility

Another regular sound bite from me in Schools Work is about 'relationships'. I hesitate to share this next story but will go ahead. Recently, I had the opportunity to do a couple of assemblies on the same day in two different schools. Now, there is nothing unusual about that in itself. I did one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and I enjoyed them both and the feedback was encouraging; hundreds of school pupils had been listening. After the second assembly, as I was signing out, I bumped into an ex pupil who had popped into the school to see some staff members. We chatted for about 10 minutes about life, the universe, God, issues etc, and off we went. As I reflected I thought, what was important that day? What was the most significant or tangible moment? Some would say the assemblies because there were hundreds of older teenagers listening, as well as loads of staff. Some would say the chat I had with the ex pupil. I personally would say both, but if pushed, it was the chat. **Schools Work, in my opinion, is about relationships.** I've learned that assemblies and the like provide the opportunity for this

kind of 'God moment', and it was indeed a God moment. However, sometimes we (myself included) do get sidetracked with the big, large assemblies, and we risk missing the significant or important opportunities. I often share this kind of thing with our associates when they start out, or with other workers if I'm asked. I think that in some ways, we sadly have become distracted by numbers etc and may have lost the individual bit. It's weird, but I have often thought this, and have numerous anecdotes similar to this one. I leave this with you. Let's beware.

Funnies

One day, I was walking to church and got quite wet. I phoned home and Joyce, who was coming later with our young son Chris (about 3 at the time), said that she would bring a change of clothes. Joyce and I were in my office and I was getting changed when suddenly there was the turn of a key...we were locked in, and Chris was on the outside! My office was upstairs at the back of the church, and it was around 10.25am. We couldn't get out. I phoned downstairs to our Minister's office, but it was unlikely that Jem would be there so close to the start of the service. However, he was! He came up and rescued Chris, let us out, and is probably still laughing now!

On another occasion, I was at Windsor Girls School doing an assembly on 'Forgiveness' with Jules, who doing his work experience with me. All was going well; Jules had just walked off stage and I was about to share some concluding thoughts. Suddenly, BANG!!!!!! CRASH!!!! Everyone thought, what was that? It was Jules; he had gone to sit on the piano stool and it had collapsed. He came back on stage and adlibbed: 'Wayne will you forgive me?!'

Finally, Joyce and Chris were with me in school one day, and I said 'we're just waiting for the Head to roll in'. There was a pause, and we realised that Chris was totally astounded, and expected a real head to fall off and roll past us.....whoops!

Thank you for reading this. I hope that it might be useful in some way if you are involved in schools as a pupil, teacher, parent, church member, child or Youth worker, fellow Schools Worker or something else. These are some of my 'Reflections of a Schools Worker'. If it causes you to want to get involved in some way with your local school(s); if it stimulates you to want to pray or give to make this work continue, then there are numerous ways to do so, and organisations that can help you to do it, including Scripture Union, who I have the pleasure to work for. Get in touch with me or with our HQ direct, and we would love to help you if we can.

God bless,

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May 2009

Some interesting and useful websites:

www.scriptureunion.org.uk

www.scriptureunion.org.uk/countmein

[http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/SU_Core/CountMeIn/CurrentVolunteers/Watchthevideo/26178.i](http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/SU_Core/CountMeIn/CurrentVolunteers/Watchthevideo/26178.id)

www.schoolslive.org

www.lightlive.org

www.wordlive.org

www.schoolswork.co.uk

www.childrenmatter.net

www.wymad.org.uk

www.sophianetwork.org.uk

www.uccf.org.uk

www.fusion.uk.com

www.hikidz.org

www.beingyourself.info

www.newswatch.org.uk

www.examattack.org.uk

www.schoolsprayernetwork.org.uk

www.prayday.eu

www.educationsunday.org

www.youthwork.co.uk

www.sloughbaptistchurch.org.uk/schoolsweek