



# Reading 147

*Answer the questions by referring to the information members of the Brett family give about their education.*

## An English Family, 80 Years of Schooling

### **Freda Brett, 85**

I started school when I was four. I didn't learn anything at my first school, we just played. Then we moved and I went to a school a mile from home — I used to walk with my brother, the roads were safe then. The headmaster really was a cruel man, he used to beat the boys. I was about eight when we moved again and I went to another school where I was very happy. I don't think we learnt all that much — we did reading, writing, arithmetic, history and geography. The boys did gardening and the girls did needlework and housewifery. The whole school was in one room, divided into classes. We sat in rows of wooden desks facing the teacher who would write on the board and ask questions. We learnt to add up in our heads — they can't do that now. We never got any homework. We had singing lessons but no piano. There were nature lessons but no art lessons. Only two people went on to secondary education in my time. We had no ambition, but our parents never put us forward either. I suppose it was as much as they could do to support us. I wish we had the opportunity to have done more — there were not the chances there are now. We never had any special training for anything specific at school.

### **Brian Brett, 65**

Discipline was enforced by fear at my first school. The headmaster was very brutal. The teachers tended to be elderly spinsters. Most learning was by rote. There wasn't a great deal of individual attention, and no homework. School was very much divorced from your home and parents.

We were a very poor family. It was a grind just to stay alive. You had no expectations really. Everyone worked locally. Each year the top class was entered for the county scholarship exam for grammar school in Stowmarket. Only one place each year went to someone from my school, and I got it. My parents had to make a great financial sacrifice to send me there. My fees were paid for, but I needed things like a uniform which cost two or three weeks' worth of my father's wages. I got a free bus pass and was entitled to free school meals too, but that was looked upon by my parents as charity, so I took sandwiches. If I hadn't got the scholarship, I would have gone to the area school and left

at about 14. Instead, my parents signed a piece of paper saying I would stay until I was 16. They were aware it might lead to something better. It tended to mean you went from blue collar to white collar. I was an outcast among my own kind: virtually ostracised. It was very difficult, not being part of the troop that roamed the village.

We did English grammar and literature, chemistry, botany and religious education. French was compulsory. The girls did cookery and prepared school meals, the boys did woodwork. There were no visual aids. There was much greater discipline because there was always the threat of being expelled. It was a very narrow education.

### ***Mike Brett, 42***

I went to four different primary schools. I quite liked school, although I didn't know what was going on. My last year was spent in a middle-class urban school that was much more formal. There was a lot of rote-learning, and I was introduced to some subjects for the first time, such as classics. It was obvious that the II-plus examination figured prominently in the school's thoughts. I think it was a shock to my parents, because it was also obvious that I wasn't going to pass it. They got me a private tutor, but I failed anyway. My father was very disappointed. All my friends bar one passed the II-plus; that still hurts today. It was totally iniquitous. I felt a failure for years after that. Education for me was a dawning process: I was a late developer. My mother told me recently that when one teacher wrote: 'He will never achieve anything in life' in my report, I was determined to prove him wrong.

So I went to the secondary modern. Discipline was rigorously enforced. Some of the teachers were absolutely brutal. It was part of the culture of the institution. It was expected that everyone in my class would do O level examinations. I scraped five. My father was amazed. I was surprised, to be honest. I remember my parents visiting the school. There had been some discussion at home about my progress. I had another private tutor for a few years, so they were obviously interested and concerned. They thought of education as a positive force in life, a passport. My mother in particular wanted me to have the opportunities she hadn't had. And by then I knew I wanted to teach. We moved, and I applied for a place at Felixstowe Grammar School. The head wasn't too keen to take me, but I got in to do history, geography and economics A levels. One of my economics teachers was quite different from other teachers I'd had. He asked us to read things and discuss them. I found it much easier to learn that way. I even remember having a lesson on a fishing boat. But the other subjects were still taught formally from the teacher's notes, a very prescriptive approach. The school wouldn't support my going to university. I was pointed towards teacher training. But then the A level examination results came out, the school changed its mind and gave me a reference, so I went to Lancaster University to read history and economics.

**Elizabeth Brett, 14**

Mum taught me to read before I went to school. I remember waiting for Dad to come home so that I could read to him; I used to love it. At school you had reading cards to take home. You had to read three more pages of your book to your parents, then they had to sign a card to say you'd done it. I loved primary school. The thing I enjoyed the most was the music. I played the recorder in school concerts and started to learn the violin. We had penpals in Tasmania who we communicated with by computer. There was lots of painting. Most of my teachers made particular emphasis that boys and girls are equal: if one of the children made a sexist comment, the teacher always made sure they were stopped.

My present school is very big. You don't feel like an individual really. I had to decide on my GCSE examination options last month — it was really hard. I couldn't do what I wanted to do — music and two languages. They wouldn't let me, they insisted I took a course like home economics, child development or business. I could see the point but felt it was putting me behind in what I wanted to do. I'm having to do an extra evening class in music which means more work.

I don't know what I'd like to do afterwards something to do with music. I want to go to university definitely. I'm proud of what my parents have done and I don't think they'd have got this far if they hadn't gone to university. I don't just want to leave school and get a job. I don't think I'd be ready to face the world.

- A. Freda
- B. Brian
- C. Mike
- D. Elizabeth

1. says fellow-pupils expected to find jobs near where they lived?
2. had potential that was not realized early?
3. regrets the lack of career choice?
4. passed an examination to go on to secondary education?
5. was prevented by the school from doing the desired choice of subjects?
6. had teachers who treated boys and girls in the same way?
7. exceeded the school's expectations?

# Reading 147 — Keys

## KEY

1 B

2 C

3 A

4 B

5 D

6 D

7 C

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