

7. Philip Abrams

What was it like having Philip around first ...

MA: Well having Philip around at first was rather strange I think the one outstanding thing that I remember, ...you know one remembers the dirty napkins and all the other rubbish of that kind. And him howling in the middle of the night. That happens with every cub. But, I hope this doesn't sound too stupid: one night Philip was put down to go to bed and he was pretty restless, and so I said, okay I will go in and attend to him, and lay down with him. And a woman friend of Una's came in after a while and said, "He is marvellous with Philip. They both are getting on so well together". And he was a comparatively easy child to get on with. He tended, later on, as he grew up I think, to become more so. He tended to be a little secretive about himself and his feelings ... you know he, he went along with things, and went his own way, very often. But I think, at that stage certainly, we got on very well together.

DA: Where was he at school from say up to about 1940/50?

MA: Ah, well once the war broke out you see, we moved out to a cottage in the country, Buckinghamshire, to a village called Kimble. And he went to the village school for a bit and then they began dropping bombs on Kimble, because Kimble was very near – we were so stupid to pick Kimble – it was very near the headquarters of Bomber Command. We didn't know that but apparently the Germans did! [laughs] And when I heard bombs had been dropped on Kimble, I thought it was time we did something. So Philip was sent off to some progressive school in Scotland¹.

DA: God!.

MA: I know! But it was remote. It was well away from any bomb-worthy target, and, you know, as progressive schools go, they seemed to be fairly reasonable – the kids did not swear incessantly, they weren't drunk all the time. [laughs] And he settled down there alright².

¹ Sonia Jackson comments, This was a progressive prep school, fashionable in left wing circles, called Kilquhannity House that had a famous headmaster, I think called Mackintosh, who was much influenced by A.S.Neill. One has to remember that this was in pre-Bowlby days but still! I think the effect was lifelong.

² Sonia Jackson adds, not according to Philip's account, which was that he was very unhappy, particularly as his sister Evelyn was able to stay with their mother Una.

DA: How old was he when he went there?

MA: Oh, quite young. He must have been, I know he must have been quite young³ because one day when I went up to see him, and Una of course went up to see him, the two of us went up to see him, the people who were running the school offered to take us for a little drive (because petrol was rationed because you couldn't drive very far) and to take Philip along with us. And they failed to strap him in. I don't think people bothered with straps in those days, but they failed to lock the door as well. And he just stumbled out of the car as it was going about twenty five miles per hour, and fell into the ditch, so he must have been quite young then. And then when the war was over we moved back to London.

DA: Was Una teaching by this time? What was she doing?

MA: As a child, was he teaching?

DA: Was Una teaching when Philip?

MA: Was Una teaching? Yes, Una did supply teaching. And it was a great help, because after the war worked out I left the London Press Exchange and joined the BBC. And Una was doing supply teaching.⁴

³ Six years old

⁴ Sonia Jackson says she thinks Mark had set Una up running a children's home in Worthing at this stage.