

NATIONAL WOMEN'S SCHOOL 2004



'I wish we cou



Rosie Tully, Gloucestershire Membership Secretary, recalls a weekend that delighted even her six-year-old

ON a freezing weekend in February I attended the National Women's School at Wortley Hall, Sheffield. This was the first time I'd been back to Wortley in over eight years and had never been to a Women's School before.

So I'll be honest, on the drive up, with sleeting rain hitting the windscreen and one grumpy child in the back seat, I was starting to ask myself "Why am I doing this?". The feeling of dread was really taking hold as I pulled into the driveway of the Hall. We carried on round the corner and wow! It was beautiful, the sun was now out and the snow had settled. My mood was starting to lift – just a little.

We trudged in to be met by warm smiles, coffee and hugs and I'd only known one person! My miserable six-year-old was suddenly a different child excitement oozing out of him.

He had spotted the crèche, which was full of children of all ages with games, toys and music enticing him in. I must say having been in the Fire Service for 13 years it felt strange being surrounded by women.

I've never felt isolated but certainly in my union work over the years I'd always been the only female and had just accepted this. I found it amazing to be around so many like-minded, friendly and outgoing women and before long I'd even remembered some names!

The weekend was to incorporate workshops of your choice (mine being The women's movement and Sylvia Pankhurst) and several guest speakers.

Over the next few days we heard from the Asylum Seeker/Refugee Centre near Sheffield,

Abortion Rights, Domestic Violence Forum of Sheffield, Sister Trade Unionists from Colombia and also a presentation from B&EMM.

These talks ranged from fun and informative to harrowing and soul searching.

Each session held a Q & A forum and this in turn led to lengthy debates. The speeches of two women from Colombia touched everyone, their bravery shone out to us all and their stories gave us a sharp reminder that there is still much work to be done around the world not just for women but for ALL worker's rights. They received a standing ovation and a collection was made to take back with them to carry on the fight for justice in Colombia.

The School drew to a hasty close as unfortunately we just ran out of time. Hurried goodbyes were said and contact lists made as we all trundled off to different parts of the country. On the way home, I asked my boy if he'd had a good time.

He thought for a while then finally said: "I wish we could live there, it's the best place in the whole world!" He then fell into tears and promptly went to sleep...sign of a good weekend I think!

Looking back it was certainly the most interesting school I'd ever been too, with the added bonus of a couple of good evenings thrown in as well.

I'll definitely be going again and would recommend it to anyone whether you're a union activist or not, as to me the balance was just right. Although next year won't be as stress free for me – he's only gone and told his little sister.

ould live here!'