

## LETTERS

## NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE FIRE SERVICE COLLEGE.

I had always dreaded the idea of going to Moreton-in-Marsh, for the Junior Control Room course, not because I thought I wasn't up to the course, but because I am a single parent.

When I joined my present brigade from Buckinghamshire in 1998, I knew that a trip would be on the cards.

My dilemma was simple, I had no-one to look after Rory, my son, (age seven) for the duration of the course. When I am normally at work I employ the services of an au-pair to care for him.

I was eventually submitted to attend JCR 01/01 in May, but it took quite a while to sort out my requirements, and I am grateful to the FBU for helping me pick apart the Brigade's Fairness and Dignity Policy, and for giving me moral support, whilst I explained my situation to my third officer.

A room was secured for me at Bowles House, but it was up to me from then on to sort out the logistics of the trip. A trip that was to require a great deal of planning and forethought on my part in order that it were to succeed.

Firstly, I had to locate a suitable school, this involved a call to Gloucestershire County Council – they sent me a list, after trial and error I eventually contacted St. David's Primary School. Fortunately they were able to accept Rory on a guest pupil basis.

It was at this point that it seemed the more I sorted things out, the more problems emerged!

I had to contend with the idea that Rory would be away from his own school during the SATS week. More detective work! I contacted QCA (the examination board) in London and ended up speaking to a Key Stage 1 advisor with regard to my predicament.

He assured me that it would be OK for Rory to sit his SATS test at the school in Moreton, the results could then be passed to his local school.

The next hurdle was with regard to the fact that school days are much shorter than course days. This was sorted out by yet another call to St. David's who advised me that they had a pre-school and after-school club, registration forms were duly completed and sent off!

It was at this point I was mostly sorted out and, began to get my head around what I would need to pack for such a lengthy trip. A problem compounded by the fact St. David's did not provide school meals.

I would need to take a week's worth of school lunches with me, together with the utensils I would need to make sandwiches! I had also decided that the time we had for breakfast would be a problem, so I decided we were better eating that in our room as it would allow us more time for the trip to school.

The week before was spent organising our luggage and finally we set off for the Fire Service College. We had to arrive early, of

course, in order that I could unpack everything and be in a position to go for a reconnaissance to find Rory's new school, the main thing was we had arrived and everything looked OK.

Monday morning arrived, for the most part my plans worked like clockwork, unfortunately though, I had overlooked the fact that the JCR course would be running through the so-called 'roll-out' weeks that occur when there is a bank holiday. This required some evening work, in this case we all had a day and a half to make up.

I felt a sickening panic run through me. Additionally the course director was not informed of my circumstances until the Thursday prior to the start of the course. This was going to be a problem I could not solve on my own.

I am grateful for the efforts of an ADO instructor who came to our rescue during these nights. As he and his partner picked Rory up from school, together with their own children, fed and entertained him until I was able to pick him up.

A crucial turning point for us however, came in the first week of the course when we were re-allocated to visitors accommodation within the grounds.

Rory and I moved to a two bedroom flat. This change made all the difference, I was now in a position where I had a proper kitchen to prepare sandwiches, breakfast and so on. I could also study in relative comfort, rather than in the same room that my son was sleeping in, which was what had happened in Bowles House.

I made good use of my time at the Fire Service College, and although I was unable to experience anything of the fabulous 'Moreton social life' (?) Rory and I were still able to visit the beautiful Cotswold countryside and make life-saving trips to the hallowed "Tesco's" at Stow-on-the-Wold.

I have many people to thank for the success of our trip, the course tutors for their encouragement and help, my fellow members of the JCR course for their sympathy and support, and their kind words for my son. Without the flexibility of St. David's School I don't think I could have attended the course. Rory will remember the kindness of the catering and security staff.

In retrospect, it would have been nicer if there had been some kind of special policy in force at the College, by which my needs could have been assessed and met without me having to do so much. I would have liked to have been less worried before I went. After all I am not some kind of freak, merely a member of society ... It also worries me, that single parents in my position might not attend such courses, simply because of the inherent difficulties they present. Fairness and Dignity Policies are there to be used and can be extremely effective. I hope that I have shown this. Finally, I am proud of my son, Rory, who took everything in his stride and coped so well at his temporary school. I knew things had turned out well, when as we drove out of the gates for the last time he turned to me and said: "Mum, when can we go again?"

Jane Bevis – LFCOp –  
Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service

## A BIG INFLUENCE ON MY LIFE

I have met many amazing people in my life, who have succeeded against all the odds, and I would like to share with you about one of them.

Her name is Patricia Botwright and she was an average working class Mum, who struggled to bring up four children, with little money and virtually alone, as her husband was a long distance lorry driver who was often away all week. When she was in her late forties her husband was diagnosed with cancer, and she spent three years nursing him until his death in 1986. She then had the trauma of losing one of her children (her second child, Sally) and her Mother within a few months of each other.

At this time she found a great deal of support and comfort in the rest of her family and friends in the Community Church at Diss.

She had never been a practising Christian, so it came as quite a shock when she announced she was being baptised as a Born Again Christian in 1988. At this time she was 50 years old and she said she felt God had a purpose in life for her.

In January 1990 a team from the Diss Community Church went on a visit to Kenya to assist with setting up a Nursery School in a very poor area of a town called Kisumu. Pat went along as part of the team and came back very moved with the poverty she had seen. She said that however poor everyone was they had been made welcome and what little they had had been shared. She was very moved by the numbers of children begging in the streets and felt she was being called to help in some way.

She made two further trips to Kenya and in June 1992 sold her home and departed to Kenya with a view to opening a children's home. Under Kenyan law she had to have a Kenyan qualification so she enrolled at the Victory Bible College in Kisumu and graduated in August 1993.

At this time she had to return to England where she had a hysterectomy as cancerous cells had been found in her womb. After a short rest she returned to Kenya accompanied by her daughter (to ensure she didn't overdo it!), where she started putting her plan into action.

On her return she found that her friend she shared a house with was looking after two young children, who attended the nursery school, and whose mother was very ill in hospital. The mother died and Pat took on the children, John and Eunice, as there was no one else to care for them. Within a very short time she was sharing her home with eight young orphans and she was officially registered as a Home with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services in April 1994. Since that time the numbers of children needing help has steadily increased. At one point Pat had over 100 children living in three different homes in Kisumu and it soon became apparent that a specially built home was needed. Pat came home on a fund raising trip to try and get



*Pat with Naomi (Naomi three years old)*



*Amy Peverett at the new site in August 2000*

support for her work and was fortunate enough to meet Bill and Gill Cody from Bedford. They gave her the money to buy land to build on and also helped with fund raising and support to see the home built. They are also sponsoring Charles (one of the oldest boys) who is studying Business Economics at Birmingham University.

There were times when there was no money for food and all they had to live on was their faith and love but somehow they have come through. She has had curses put on her (witchcraft is still rife in rural Kenya), had to cope with corruption and has had several serious bouts of malaria but she is as determined as ever to see her work completed and see the home become as self sufficient as possible. Many people told her to give up, she was too old; didn't have a business head and she was a woman in a society where women are treated as second class citizens.

In the Autumn of 2000 her dream was realised and the first stage of Covenant House was opened by the District Commissioner. Two purpose built dormitories with toilets and showers, a large kitchen and dining room, accommodation for the workers and a school room which doubles as a church on Sundays. A workshop is also under construction and the next phase will be accommodation for Pat and a clinic. This dream has become a reality by the support of hundreds of people who donated money and sponsored children and by Pat's refusal to give up when she was told this is impossible to achieve.

Where did I meet this lady you ask?

I am very proud to say that this brave lady is my mum!

**Sharon Peverett**  
**Norfolk Control (Region 10)**

## LETTERS

## JOB SHARE

In Staffordshire Fire Control we have two Job Sharers, Jan Round and Melanie Shore and although the scheme has not been operating for a great deal of time, both participants feel that they have benefited from the opportunity for part time working. Here are their personal thoughts on Job Share.

**Helen Harrison**

I have been sharing my job as a Fire Control Operator since February 1999. As this was a new venture for my brigade, a twelve month trial was agreed during which the situation was regularly reviewed. A policy was agreed with Management, using the FBU model as a guide. My husband and I are of the opinion that time is much more valuable than money in the bank, so the loss of half my salary did not concern us much. The birth of my son, Devon, now a year old, has meant that I have plenty to keep me occupied. I have great fun with him at home and very few childcare requirements.

I still have a rewarding, responsible job that is well paid compared to most other part time work.

Since I have been a Job Sharer I have made more friends in the village where I live and spent more time with my husband. I have had more sleep (yes even with a baby) and have been able to keep fit, cycle, run and hill walk. I generally feel more relaxed about life. Shift work can take its toll on your life, especially after 15 years. So if you can manage without the cash, want to spend more time with your family, health and education, I can fully recommend Jobshare.

**Jan Round – Fire Control Operator**

## FEMALE FIREFIGHTER – WOMAN FIREFIGHTER

We all agree that language is important. The amount of energy we each expend in correcting people (both men and women) when they refer to adult women in the workplace as “girl”, “honey”, “broad”, and worse, often depends on such variables as our backgrounds, how much time we have on the job, who made the remark, (co-worker? Chief of department? civilian?), whether we are distracted by more pressing issues, and a host of other factors. Even though women have been in the career fire service for more than fifteen years, co-workers and civilians alike get tongue-tied when trying to think of what to call a woman in turnout gear. Years ago (May, 1984 Firework), I wrote about the problem of women firefighters being referred to as “firemen”. Although that sexist language and attitude persists in some tradition-bound organisations (along with the use of male pronouns such as “Brothers” to refer to a workforce that contains people of both genders), most fire service organisations



**Jan and Devon Round in the Lake District**

The biggest single benefit for me from Jobshare has been that I have been able to continue my career. I now have two children and could not have carried on with full time shift work. My partner has a demanding job with long and often irregular hours that would have made shift changeovers and night shifts impossible. Jobshare has meant that I still have my career but I have been able to spend much more time with the children. My life is easier because I do not have to rely on others for childcare. I also do not have to payout for child care. In the future I look forward to having more time for whatever comes along. I hope to go to college or just have more time for me!

**Melanie Shore, Fire Control Operator**

are slowly altering their terminology to include women.

The Fire Service divides over whether to refer to women employees as “women firefighters” or “female firefighters”. More surprisingly, we continually hear consultants, lawyers, politicians and others who should know better, refer to us as “female firefighters”. Women themselves seem uncertain about what term to use.

I would suggest that, in the interest of advancing women’s full acceptance in the fire service, we should consistently use “women” rather than “female” firefighters. Using the word “women” goes far beyond semantics. It goes to the core of how we and others perceive us as full persons – recognising our humanity and our culture rather than focusing on our sexual organs or childbearing capacity. The use of “female firefighter” increasingly grates on me, but I had never been able to fully articulate the reasons for this. Then I looked in the dictionary.

Webster’s Vest Pocket Dictionary (1989 ed.) succinctly states the difference between the two terms :

Female – adj.; relating to or being the sex that bears young.

Woman – n. 1: adult female person; 2: womankind; 3: feminine nature.

Womankind – n.: females of human race.

Webster's New World Dictionary (3rd College Edition, 1988) spends a paragraph under its definition of "woman" distinguishing it from "female" and "lady":

"Woman is the standard general term for the adult human being of the sex distinguished from 'man'; female, referring specifically to sex, is applied to plants and animals, but is now regarded as a mildly contemptuous equivalent for women ...; lady, used specifically of a woman of the upper classes and until recently commonly used in polite or genteel reference to any woman is now avoided as a general substitute for 'woman', except in such formulas as 'ladies and gentlemen'. Under its definition of "female", Webster's makes note of the use of the word that surprised (and maybe embarrassed) a lot of us non-plumbers when we had our first tools class:

"Female" includes designation or having a hollow part shaped to receive a corresponding inserted part (called "male"): said of pipe fittings, electrical sockets, etc.

If some of you are still unconvinced that it makes a difference whether we are called "women" or "female" firefighters, remember that only a few years ago, people were arguing that we did not need to change "fireman" to "firefighter". Perceptions about the kind of person for the job are shaped by the names we use for the job. Let's not lump ourselves together with female dogs, cats, plants, etc, based on our common sexuality. Let's use the word "women" to distinguish ourselves from other species, recognise our humanity and celebrate our culture. The alternative is to continue to suffer from an overweening, derogatory perception of our gender.

**Branda Berkman, President,  
Women in the Fire Service (WFS), New York, USA**

## SENSITIVE?

Recently, someone sent the WFS office a copy of a consultant's proposal for some fire department training sessions. The proposal was called "Sensitive Training Regarding Females in the Fire Service." What better way to shoot yourself in the foot than to put your own insensitivity right out there on the title page? The sad part of it is, though, that the (male) fire officers reviewing the proposal probably didn't even notice the insult.

I was very glad to receive Brenda's article this month on the word "female". I don't think there is currently a word usage that irritates me more than to hear "female" used as a noun to refer to women. When I hear someone refer to "females in the fire service", I always want to ask female what? Couplings? Giraffes? Tarantulas?

Either I'm getting more sensitised to it, or the usage is becoming more common. An optimist would suggest that maybe some of the men who used to call women even worse things have now "improved" to the point of saying "female".

While this may be true, a lot of men who should be our allies are still out there talking about "females in the fire service". Just to take a recent example, an article by a progressive fire chief in the January issue of Fire Chief magazine uses "females" twelve times and "women" only once. It's clear that many men find "female" more comfortable to say.

Like much of the terminology that has gone before, "female" is sometimes used by men who are unaware that their usage of it is offensive, once again it seems up to women to do the educating around the issue. When I hear "female" used as a noun, I find it :Demeaning. Female refers to gender only, not to the fact of being human. Focusing on gender and using a neutral – scientific term rather than a human one denies the humanity, dignity and culture of women.

Alienating. "Women" is the proper counterpart to the word "men". When a man refuses to use the word "women" he indicates his own unwillingness to perceive women as adults and peers.

Awkward. Having to make an adjective into a noun implies that no really good way exists to refer to this odd group of entities.

Downright curious. After I listen for a while to a speaker who consistently refers to "females", I just have to wonder: What is it that it keeps you from being able to say 'women'? Are you equally uncomfortable saying 'men'?

As a writer and editor, I don't object to the occasional use of "female" strictly as an adjective, especially in pairings such as female reproductive systems". That can be correct and equitable usage. It's also convenient, in a long paragraph, to have a synonym for the adjective and not have to say "women firefighters" on every line. But even as an adjective, the word is subject to abuse, as in "female issues", or "female uniforms". Issues can not be male or female, nor can uniforms, so I can't say I really disagree with Brenda that maybe it's time to jettison our entire usage of the word, lest we assist its continued misuse against us.

**Terry Floren, Executive Director, WFS**

## FRIENDS IN NEED . . .

I would appreciate if you would print this letter of thanks to the crew at Caversham Fire Station, Reading for the hospitality they provided when I turned up on their door step, (Tuesday 3 July), tired and dishevelled after a long, long drive from Braemar to visit friends in their area. My friends were not at home when I arrived, so I headed for the local fire station where I was allowed to have a shower and freshen up – a life saver to any traveller. So thanks again Caversham and any time you are in the Braemar area, feel free to call in at my local station.

**Wendy Woods (firefighter)  
Braemar Fire Station, Grampian Fire Brigade**

## LETTERS



*Sian Griffiths, left, Ghada Ruzuki, centre, and Pam Oparaocha. Willesden Blue Watch, October 2000.*

## GHADA THE GREAT

It is with great personal regret that I am writing this article. My very good friend and splendid colleague, Ghada Razuki has resigned from the London Fire Brigade on 31 October 2000 after over 15 years service.

Ghada's entire colourful career was spent as a firefighter at the illustrious Willesden blue watch in Northwest London and the impact she made there was profound.

The whole station is acutely aware of the void she has left behind and it is unlikely to ever be filled in the same rich way again. Only last week, at a watch wedding, the wife of one of her colleagues (Steve Harris) said that "she was missing Ghada and she didn't even work with her!"

However she didn't just leave her mark at the fire station because anyone who has ever had any thing to do with the FBU will know of Ghada and her dedication and integrity. One might think that she would restrict her energy to support only women's rights and race equality issues but nothing could be further from the truth. She tirelessly campaigned on issues of justice both in and outside of the FBU and offered support to the membership nationally.

Nothing was too much trouble for Ghada, whether it was sorting out a colleague's pressing welfare issue or grievance, or writing to the many people from outside the fire service with

whom she constantly networked and fundraised for. The parents of Ricky Reel and Stephen Lawrence, striking Dockers, Miners, Ambulance Workers, Hospital Cleaners – the list of like-minded people goes on and on, all of whom were on first name terms with her. Ghada has been as vociferous in her challenging of unfair changes to the National Conditions of Service as she has been on gay rights or any other issue that affects civil liberties.

Ghada would also attend many conferences, meetings and schools in her own time as she hated to be away from work and her watch unnecessarily.

Although she never went for promotion or FBU Officer position, Ghada has natural leadership qualities and was a fantastic organiser for lobbies and watch dos alike. I would hazard a bet that if it wasn't for Ghada, Ken Livingstone may well not be where he is today!

However like anyone who has ruffled the feathers of those on high, Ghada's profile goes before her and has sometimes been judged too harshly by those who misunderstood her objectives. One of her successful activities was to expose people who should know better for their lack of commitment and integrity to their FBU colleagues or for contravening fire service rules they so readily apply to those of lower rank. If one makes enemies just by dedication to their job, it is often an indication that they are doing something right. However the huge amount of work that Ghada undertook in her relatively short career

ultimately took its toll. Although Ghada's dedication was recognised by all, it seemed that she was only really appreciated by those of us who knew her well and never questioned her integrity. So she got a better offer and took it while she was still young(ish) and lovely enough to make the most of it.

Whilst women have been wholetime firefighters for a substantial time (25 years), unfortunately the amount of women employed by brigades is less than substantial. This is then compounded by the retention of women as firefighters, which is especially rocky. When morale and self-esteem are knocked people often see it as time to move on. Any woman leaving is bad news but losing Ghada was personally heartbreaking. However, she had one of the best leaving dos I have ever been to and I know she is happy in her new career which, involves travelling to the far corners of the world and being paid for it. And true to form, without stopping for breath she is already busy negotiating reduced rates for Trade Union members. She never stops.

Ghada, from the blue watch, we wish you all the very best for the future but although we don't miss the fags, we do miss you.

**With love**  
Sian Griffiths



*Ghada Razuki at FBU Annual Conference 1999*



*Willesden Blue Watch, Oct 2000. Back row L-R: Kent Gayle, Ghada Razuki, Grant Watson. Front: Michael Ogilvie*

## LETTERS

### SCHOOL REPORT

Wortley Hall is a very grand old house, now ran as a cooperative, and owned by many, including the FBU. It is set in glorious countryside, in the village of Wortley, which is reasonably close to Sheffield in Yorkshire.

I attended the Women's National School on the 9-11 March 2001 and I wish to report my interpretation of the weekend.

Before a school, I was nothing short of cynical, but after working in the Fire Service for nearly ten years, I experienced problems and felt I had nobody to turn to who understood, cared, or knew what to do. I attended the weekend, in the hope that I could Network with others, and assist those who need someone to guide and support them. If something is wrong, there are people who can and will help you!

After introductions, Mary Davis spoke about Women, Class and oppression. She defined the meanings from as far back as the 1830's to the present day, and how women today are fighting for rights which benefit all workers, whether single, married, white, black, gay, female, male, or for those who have dependants.

Everyone then had the opportunity to experience the theatre group Banner. They had created this adaptation from real life situations and put them into a musical play, encouraging people to see the other side of the coin, and think more about what they say and do to others. Day two – consisted of workshops, covering areas such as;

- Health and Safety
- Harassment and Bullying/Representation
- Assertiveness
- Maternity/Paternity

I must report, I felt distraught at the number of women who have been treated disgracefully, suffering from direct and indirect discrimination, with their respective brigades repeatedly sweeping the problems under the carpet, instead of treating their fellow employees with the respect they deserve as individuals, and dealing with the offenders in the correct manner.

Day three – we were privileged to listen to Ruth Winters, her life story, and her vision for the future. Ruth is the Vice President of the FBU, and inspired us all. We then had a guest speaker from the MSF on the Vauxhall Dispute which wrecked many families' lives when the Vauxhall plant was closed down, just before Christmas last year, and comparing the government

assistance with that from other European countries.

In all ; there was a lot of information to take in and I felt mentally exhausted by the end of the weekend, but at the same time I felt refreshed to find I was not alone in my opinions, and in my constant battles to keep my head above water, and this weekend has given me encouragement to keep treading water, and slowly but surely make my way to shore.

This may seem like a weird analogy, but sometimes I just feel like stopping treading water, but I know if I do then I will surely drown, or at least I would have before the weekend.

To summarise ; the weekend has provided for me a warm and friendly atmosphere in a sociable environment sharing knowledge and experience, creating and increasing networking which in turn can assist brigades with procedures and policy making, for a better future.

Sharon Sales,  
Mossop



Women's School 2001

## PHENOMENAL WOMAN

*Pretty woman wonder where my  
secret lies.*

*I'm not cute or built to suit the  
fashion model's size*

*But when I start to tell them,  
They think I'm telling lies.*

*I say,*

*It's in the reach of my arms,*

*The span of my hips,*

*The stride of my step,*

*The curl of my lips.*

*I'm a woman,*

*Phenomenally,*

*Phenomenal woman,*

*That's me.*

*I walk into a room*

*Just as cool as you please,*

*And to a man*

*the fellows stand or*

*fall down on their knees,*

*Then they swarm around me,*

*A hive of honey bees.*

*I say,*

*It's the fire in my eyes,*

*And the flash of my teeth,*

*The swing in my waist,*

*And the joy in my feet,*

*I'm a woman*

*Phenomenally,*

*Phenomenal woman,*

*That's me.*

*Men themselves have wondered*

*What they see in me,*

*They try so much,*

*But they can't touch*

*My inner mystery,*

*When I try to show them,*

*They say they still can't see*

*I say,*

*It's in the arch of my back,*

*The sun of my smile,*

*The ride of my breasts,*

*The grace of my style,*

*I'm a woman*

*Phenomenally,*

*Phenomenal woman,*

*That's me.*

*Now you understand,*

*Just why my head's not bowed,*

*I don't shout or jump about,*

*Or have to talk real loud,*

*When you see me passing,*

*It ought to make you proud.*

*I say,*

*It's in the click of my heels,*

*The bend of my hair,*

*The palm of my hand,*

*The need for my care.*

*Cause I'm a woman,*

*Phenomenally,*

*Phenomenal woman,*

*That's me.*

**Maya Angelou**