



TO SIR (AND MISS)



Our school days were often boring, hard and stressful – with their fair share of science or maths masters droning on in front of sleepy teenagers. But we also met some inspirational, funny and life-changing teachers there.

To mark **World Teachers' Day** on 5 October, we ask some well-known high achievers about the one educator who really struck a chord with them



WITH LOVE

Interviews by Daphne Lockyer
and Danny Scott



HUGH CORNWELL, 69, MUSICIAN

I lived virtually next door to my north London school. I could wake up and be in assembly within ten minutes. I had some interesting mates – such as Richard Thompson, who went on to form Fairport Convention – and some great teachers. The university entrance rate was 98%!

Our young chemistry tutor, Mr Harris, was a right laugh. In the sixth form, it was decided that we were being far too bookish, so we needed some general studies courses.

He came up with the idea of Contemporary Cinema. I liked James Bond films, but I suddenly found myself studying all the way-out-there, European art-house classics: Louis Malle, the French New Wave... From the

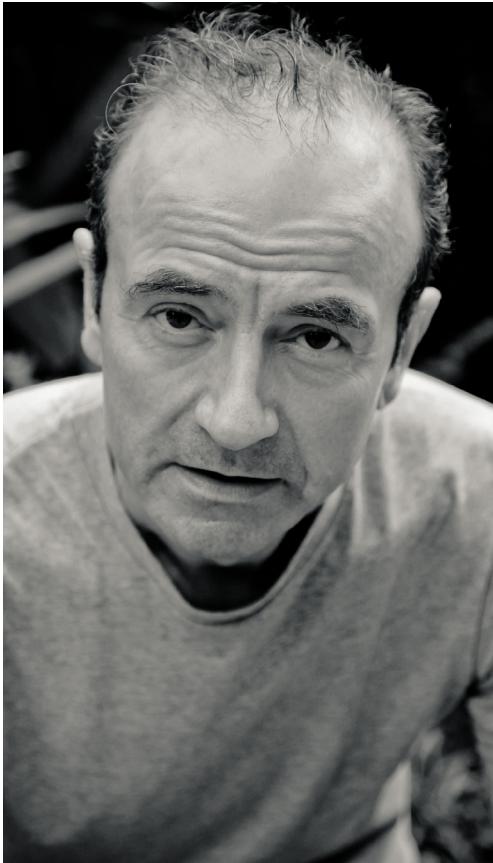


moment I saw *Viridiana* by Luis Buñuel, film became my escape. It's a love that has stayed with me to this day.

I now have my own streaming radio station website called Mr DeMille FM [mrudemillefm.com], where I make shows about the cinema.

I don't know if Mr Harris is still around, but it would be nice to tell him, 'Thank you'. Thanks for the films and thanks for keeping quiet when we almost blew up the chemistry lab! **DS**

Hugh Cornwell's new album, Monster, is out on 5 Oct and he's on tour nationwide in Nov (hughcornwell.com)



DAVE GORMAN, 47, COMEDIAN

Some of the teachers at my Stafford high school were a bit... well, there was no passion. But Roy Samson's English lessons would surprise you. You'd start off over here, then suddenly find yourself right over there. Yes, education had to have a 'structure', but he never let

that get in the way of something interesting. He wanted us to love books and language as much as he did.

Once, I wrote an essay on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He gave us a few instructions, but I decided to ignore him and wrote something completely different. It was a bit of a mess, but he actually gave me an A for breaking the rules! I remember him telling me that breaking the rules was OK, as long as you knew why you were doing it. That's probably the best piece of advice that anyone's ever given me. **DS**

Dave's show With Great Powerpoint Comes Great Responsibilitypoint, is touring the UK now (davegorman.com)



DAME EVELYN GLENNIE, 53, VIRTUOSO PERCUSSIONIST

My large comprehensive in Ellon, near Aberdeen, was a 'can do' school – all children belonged to all departments. As a hearing-impaired person, I was included in everything musical, not excluded in any way. The peripatetic percussion teacher, Ron Forbes, adapted his teaching to each pupil, and introduced me to hearing sounds through vibration. He totally believed in my ambition to become a professional musician. He showed me that boundaries can be moved if you've got the determination.

After he retired, we still exchanged cards at Christmas, but I didn't see him for about 25 years. But, when I was awarded the 2015 Polar Music Prize in Sweden [often called the Nobel Prize for music], I so wanted him to be there. And he was. **DS**

Evelyn composed music for RSC's Troilus and Cressida, at Stratford, 12 Oct-17 Nov. Live cinema shows, 14 Nov (rsc.org.uk)



KATHY LETTE, 59, AUTHOR

My English teacher, Ms Buchanan, wafted into Sylvania High School, New South Wales like a heroine from a novel. Blonde cropped hair, svelte, tall, an ironical eyebrow cocked at all times, she was Miss Jean Brodie without the mad bits. She fed me Austen, Keats and Thackeray, and didn't dismiss my amateur prose, but saw a glimmer of talent and fostered it.

The fact that I penned my first novel aged 17 is partly due to her kind encouragement. If I'd only known that my school days would be the best of my life, I would have stayed there longer. Desperate to see the world, I left aged 16. (I'm an autodidact. Obviously, it's a



word I taught myself! The only examination I've ever passed is my cervical smear test.)

But every time I pick up my pen to start writing a new novel – and I'm up to number 15 now – I secretly thank the one teacher who saw potential in me... Ms Buchanan. **DS**

Kathy's show Girls Night Out tours the UK from 4 Oct (kathylette.com)



Inspiration



PETER JAMES, 70, CRIME WRITER

I was bullied at Charterhouse. In my first week there, I can remember some kids sitting on a wall shouting, 'Jew, Jew, Jew!', all because I had a big nose and curly hair.

Your teenage years are all about trying to build a bit of confidence, but I had such a s*** time that mine was knocked for six. It didn't help that a lot of staff seemed to teach by fear. You had no chance to find out what you were good at

because you were too busy worrying about what you'd done wrong.

The one beacon of light was my English teacher, David Summerscale. His was a gentle encouragement... 'You've got a talent, so make sure you use it.'

When my first successful book, *Possession*, was published in 1988, I acknowledged the inspiration he had given me. I met up with him some years ago for lunch, and he asked me to write a short story for his son's new magazine. It was the circle of life. A wonderfully enriching experience. **DS** *Absolute Proof* by Peter James is published 4 Oct



LYNDA LA PLANTE, 75, AUTHOR, SCREENWRITER AND FORMER ACTRESS

Dawn McCormick, my speech and drama teacher, was the most glamorous creature any 11-year-old had ever encountered. She was surrounded by a cloud of perfume, with stilettos and glossy lipstick.

My St Trinian's-esque girls' school in Liverpool didn't exactly offer an academic education – we'd applaud in assembly when someone passed an O-level. One of the most useful things I learned was how to fillet a piece of cooked salmon. But I longed to impress Miss McCormick. I'd deliver poems standing up and giving it every nuance of emotion. 'Uh, Lynda,' she said, 'you do know you're not meant to move around reciting poems? Have you thought of acting?'

A former actress, she saw something in me and started casting me in plays. Later, she thought I should apply to RADA – which was like suggesting the space programme. But she worked with me on audition pieces and I got in. **DL**

Lynda La Plante's fourth Jane Tennison thriller, *Murder Mile*, is out now



RAY MEARS, 54, SURVIVAL EXPERT AND TV PRESENTER

Believe it or not, judo was a compulsory lesson at Downside Lodge Preparatory School in Purley, near Croydon. Kingsley Hopkins became my teacher when I was about eight and he'd been a pupil of Gunji Koizumi, the man who introduced the martial art to the UK.

For Kingsley, judo was about much more than self-defence. These were lessons for living. Teaching us how to fall over; how to relax; how to concentrate; how to confront a situation that you find daunting. And he had a great love of the outdoors. He taught me how to cook in the wild and how to make sure what you're eating isn't going to make you ill. Via Kingsley, I became inspired by the beautiful British countryside.

I wasn't a brilliant student, but I came away from Downside with much more than qualifications.

Kingsley had – even though I didn't know it at the time – set me off on a journey that would become a career and change my entire life. **DS**

Ray Mears has just celebrated the 35th anniversary of *Woodlore*, Britain's first School of Wilderness Bushcraft



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