

Growing up, coming out, making good

Saatchi artist Simon Tarrant recalls an uncommon childhood

I was born at the nun run maternity hospital St Theresa's on the Downs and like my father and grandfather before me was educated at King's College School Wimbledon.

Early memories of Wimbledon include the Pinky and Perky pigs in the village sweetshop, conker picking, the summer drought of '76 when the Common was ablaze with fire, the magical day the Wombles set up camp at Cannizaro and the huge bomb that nearly ruined my English Education. Our beloved English teacher at King's, the legendary Frank "get out of the bloody room" Miles, had a narrow escape when the IRA exploded a bomb outside his neighbour's house on Woodhayes Road. The neighbour in question was the Attorney-General, Sir Michael Havers, who represented the Crown in the trials of the Guildford Four.

Then of the golden month of June when the excitement of my birthday would be almost eclipsed by the fabulous fair next to Rushmere and of course the tennis where we queued all night to cheer Björn Borg in his final five set triumph over John McEnroe.

Always the Common though, long walks with our dogs Pluto, Womble and Mel, bike rides on our 'Chippers' and 'Choppers' to the Windmill and witnessing my sister Jane's terror when riding her horse "Tizzy" (short for Anticipation). Then there were the halcyon days of pints of snakebite on the grass outside the Hand in Hand, my first foray into *plein air* oil painting in the long rushes lining the old gravel pits and the time we all ran to see Pope Jean Paul land in a helicopter at the Papal legate on Parkside.

"Get out of the bloody room!"

There were only girlfriends in those days... I was too scared to go to the Prince of Wales pub down Wimbledon Hill, which had a reputation for being gay. It seemed unimaginable to contemplate a gay life in Wimbledon in spite of my flamboyant and colourful New Romantic fashions, which included fingerless gloves, a torn David Bowie T-shirt, a melted school tie and the obligatory Winklepicker shoes. The only near gay experience of my youth was on the

common, when a flasher followed me and I hid up a tree!

The happy innocent memories of my Wimbledon upbringing were jolted when I left school to pursue a career in diamonds. My first job was in the Congo where I lived until I was twenty-one. Then after a decade of international travel which culminated in a job as De Beers Marketing Director in Hong Kong, I decided to throw it all in and become an artist. It was a huge but satisfying leap and these past fifteen years I haven't looked back. Self taught, I have worked hard to hone my skills and establish my reputation. I exhibit work every year and have been exhibited at the Royal Academy of Art and currently at the Saatchi Gallery. A long held ambition is to exhibit some paintings back in Wimbledon, perhaps a series of the common...

Simon's 'Red Sky' at the Saatchi

