

SCHOOL
DAYS

TAYMA PAGE ALLIES

Jewellery designer

'I learned more
from my holidays
than at school'

The beauty of my schooldays lay in their diversity. I lived in very different countries and went to a variety of schools which meant I was privileged to mix with people of different races, religions and cultures.

But to be honest, I learned more from my holidays than I did at school.

I was 2½ when I went to kindergarten on the Mediterranean island of Malta. Malta was a curious Catholic/Muslim mix, most visible in that many women covered up.

My first language was Maltese because I was looked after by a nanny due to my mother having Mediterranean fever.

Kindergarten was a very old-fashioned convent and you'd be smacked for misbehaving, and made to stand in the corner.

When I was nine, we moved to Trinidad in the Caribbean where I first went to an international school.

Trinidad was a sun-blessed island with pets, pawpaws and sailing boats. There was calypso music and patio parties, we'd go to Barbados for holidays and I loved it.

I was always in the top three in class and particularly enjoyed English, languages and history. I loved learning and I still read a lot today.

The headmistress was completely batty – we were 10 or 11 years old and she seemed like 100.

One of my friends was called Cookie and we're still pals today. We both did the 11-plus together and went on to St Joseph's Convent, where I was the only blonde, blue-eyed girl and stood out.

There was a tannoy system, and before and after class, the Mother Superior would say the Hail Mary over it.

Having nuns as teachers was strange. You couldn't see their hair as it was tucked behind their wimples although as time went by we did begin to see their hair and even their ankles, which fascinated us.

Every morning our nails would be checked to ensure they had no polish and our skirts so that they were regulation length.

Eventually,

after a coup d'etat, I returned to England where I boarded at a school in Leamington Spa.

I loved it, but I didn't like boarding as it meant I had to go to bed at the same time as the other girls so I felt hemmed in.

By the sixth form, my parents had moved to Nigeria so I'd go there in the holidays.

Everyone lived in compounds with security guards and it made me realise how lucky I had been growing up in the Caribbean.

I went on to Leicester University in Britain where I studied English, French, Italian and history of art.

My greatest achievement there was reading Dante's *La Divina Commedia* in the original Italian, and managing to understand it.

When I graduated, I went on to do a TEFL course then taught in Nigeria. I followed it up with a postgraduate course in education and psychology at Warwick University.

Who should I meet on campus one day but Cookie from Trinidad. I didn't know she was there so it was a lovely surprise.

I then taught for three years in a Coventry comprehensive school, which was a fascinating eye-opener.

I gave it up to become a recruitment consultant then went into the exhibition and conference business and came to Hong Kong 21 years ago.

Fifteen years ago, I started to design and sell jewellery and it's ideal because it's creative and artistic.

I choose every stone and design every piece. It's my passion because I pour my personality into them.

And it still feels that I'm teaching in that I'm always explaining to customers about the gemstones.

While I'm the first to say no one really needs jewellery, I know it makes many women very happy. When you fall in love with it, it casts a spell and makes you feel very special.

And if you work long hours, then everyone needs a treat, don't they?

Tayma Page Allies is a Hong Kong jewellery designer. She was talking to David Phair.

