

Life story of Molly McConville

Molly McConville is a life-long resident of London, although for three of those years she lived and worked abroad, with her husband. Now retired, she looks back at her life, and talks about how she got to where she is today and what it all means to her.



Mrs Molly McConville. Photo Sue McPherson 2003

Age 67 when the interview took place, Molly says about her life: “I would only say that I’m not totally settled in my life of half-retirement, but I still don’t feel in any way sidelined by life or by people. I still feel that there’s plenty I could do out there – not to earn money, necessarily, but to be active in the world.” She adds, too, “Living in London there’s always something that comes your way, that you feel you could or you ought to get involved in and do something. It’s always

there – around you – and it’s quite hard, even, to say, Well, actually, I think I’m doing enough already. Time for doing my own thing.”

During the interview, Molly spoke often of the notion of ‘duty’ versus ‘doing for oneself,’ and how that applied to her mother’s life as well as her own. When her mother married, “she gave up work, even though they weren’t wealthy. . . .she loved her job, which was secretarial.” She had not wanted to give it up, Molly continues, but staying home with the children, for many women of that era, was the thing to do. Molly decided to live her life differently. She decided to compromise, by working only part-time along with being primary carer for their young children. But the sense of being independent was important, and she always worked at some job or another.

Cared for by her mother after her parents separated, Molly now refers to this time of her life, when she and her sister were growing up, as a “quite narrow but a happy life.” At three years of age in 1939, Molly was not old enough to be worried by the onset of World War II, she says, nor was her family affected directly. They lived in south-east London at the time and she recalls that houses nearby were bombed, but she did not realise that they themselves were in danger. Later, she began to attend a convent school close by – strict, but kind, she recalls.

Leaving school at 17, Molly went to work in offices doing clerical and secretarial work. She moved out from her home at 21, as living in a bed-sit seemed like a good idea too. She says, “I looked forward to being independent, to doing my own thing – not having a mother concerned all the time about what you were doing.” Education was not on her mind at this time in her life. She was happy going out to work, and looking forward to one day being married and having children.

By chance, many years later, it was her mother dying that brought about the opportunity for her to attend the polytechnic. Molly had given up her part-time job to take care of her mother, who was dying of cancer. Within a few weeks her mother had died, but instead of returning to work she thought this was an opportunity, now that the children were in school, to do something different. Three years later, at age 41, she had a degree in English followed up with teachers’ training.

For the next ten years Molly taught secondary school, and then an opportunity came for her to go to Palestine. Her husband was working there, and she was able to join him and work there also. She says of this time, “It was definitely a privilege, and a great experience to go and live in another country and meet people of another culture.”

When she returned to England she went back to teaching – at secondary schools, until about six years ago, when she retired, at age 61. She still helps out in the primary grade classrooms, as an assistant, both paid and voluntary. She laughs as she tells me the latest development in her work history. “At the moment,” she says, “the only work I’m doing in the school is as an occasional dinner lady.” Nevertheless, she is adamant in her belief that she “wouldn’t have the strength or desire to go back into teaching.” She says, “I haven’t the energy to do all that extra preparation and all the stuff that goes with it.” As a means of keeping in touch with her skills, however, and to earn money, she does some exam marking for SATs and other secondary school courses.

Molly looks back on her life and tells how, as far as work went, it did not turn out the way she thought it would. She says now, “I thought I’d teach for twenty years and then retire. . . but then it was interrupted by going abroad. I did teach. . . but it’s not been the kind of teaching I might have done if I’d stayed in England. I’ve done all different kinds of teaching, and not settled in one place, since I came back.”

There is another side to Molly’s life, besides paid work, and that is her family, and her personal and social life. She and her husband have two children, their son who has three of his own, and their daughter who has one. Molly looks after her daughter’s youngster while she is at work, after school each day and during the holidays. Molly and her husband have been married over forty years. They have joint friends, but also have their separate interests. “We both enjoy being on our own,” Molly says. “If one of us goes away for a week or two I think secretly the other one enjoys it. It’s that great bit of independence, but it’s very nice when they come home.”

As to intimacy, Molly says, “I’m not sure what intimacy is. I’m not sure if one can achieve it. . . We don’t always agree. We’re totally different personalities. . . .But we do both care about our daughter, our son, and our grandchildren . . . I suppose that’s what it is, when you live with somebody, the things that really matter are the same. . . We seem to really agree on almost everything – politics, ethics, and so on, but we’re totally different in our approach. So he thinks that I don’t agree with him on most things. In fact I do. I just am a more emotional, outgoing person than he is.”

Outside her family life, Molly is kept busy through involvement in several organisations and groups—social, political, and religious—performing practical tasks and commitments such as singing in a choir, letter-writing, facilitating, active listening, and committee work, including membership in management committees. As well as all this, she manages to squeeze in the exam marking. She also feels she would enjoy more cultural events and entertainment, but says, “I push things away a little bit, and I feel that now I’m not working, or hardly working, I really should be a bit more spontaneous and do what I want to do. . . and not think, Well I should actually be doing this, or I should be doing that. I ought to just go and do things. So, I’m not quite adjusted to retirement.”

Life story of Molly McConville written by Sue McPherson following interview in 2003, amended 2005.

Diversity in Retirement website: <http://DiversityinRetirement.homestead.com> 2004-05.

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