

# The path to Oxford and the BBC

Sally Jones



“When in the late 60s my junior school headmistress suggested I, Sally Jones, sit the entrance exam for King Edward’s High School in Birmingham – then a fee-paying direct grant school – my

parents, who had never heard of it, were doubtful. I, however, jumped at the chance. Not for the educational opportunity, but because, coming from rural Warwickshire, I loved the idea of going to school by train. And feeling out of place at my grammar school, I also longed for a new start, where as a dreamy, forgetful first year I had been teased for speaking differently, for loving poetry, and for being a year younger than my peers.

“During the entrance exam, surrounded by hundreds of little girls, many from fancy prep schools (how I longed to wear a straw hat with a ribbon) I stared in wonder at the gracious, Malory Towers-style buildings, indoor swimming pool, honours boards, and shining parquet floors – the antithesis of the grammar school’s dilapidated 60s blocks. For me it was love at first sight and once home I wept bitterly because I already loved King Edward’s so much I couldn’t bear not to go there.

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“In March a thrillingly official letter arrived. I had passed, and, best of all, because I lived in Warwickshire rather than Birmingham, the local education authority would pay my school fees and my travelling costs – crucial as my parents could otherwise not have afforded the fees.

I spent the next seven years playing sport, singing, writing and relishing the liberal, friendly atmosphere. I then scraped into Oxford to study English, thanks to a spirited defence of cannibalism and an essay on Alexander Pope, who hadn’t featured on any syllabus – the school had encouraged us to pursue our own passions, not just chase top grades.

“At Oxford, sport, drama and broadcasting figured as prominently as my studies, and helped me win a place on the BBC’s News trainee scheme, which in turn led to a job on BBC Breakfast Time, where I became Britain’s first networked woman sports presenter.

“Several near-contemporaries from King Edward’s, including the actress Lindsay Duncan, the front-bench Tory David ‘Two Brains’ Willetts, and the current King Edward’s Chief Master, John Cloughton, went on to far more distinguished careers than mine, but the common factor was that initial free place which gave us all a top-class education.”



For Sally Jones, it was love at first sight when she sat the scholarship for KEHS, Birmingham