

Transcript of *Auslandsjournal Extra*, broadcast by *3sat*, the joint German-Swiss-Austrian TV channel, 9:30 pm January 16th 2015. The programme was made in Autumn 2014 by Mo Davies and Patricia Schäfer of ZDF TV.

Main presenter:

Over in England BSS has kicked off a wide debate. BSS stands for *Boarding School Syndrome*. The question posed is whether, in fact, these famous, prestigious and expensive schools actually make people ill. Many British prime ministers, bankers and actors went to such schools: the British establishment is made up of ex-boarders. The education is excellent, no doubt, but how do children feel when they have to go away to boarding school at the tender age of five? What does it mean for them personally? Opinions differ considerably on this question – Patricia Schäfer reports:

Patricia Schäfer:

Eton College feels like a cross between Hogwarts and Cambridge. It's just outside Windsor. To get into this school you have to be booked in at birth. Prime minister Cameron, George Orwell, Princes William and Harry – the list of old boys reads like a *Who's Who?* of the British establishment. Sam Barber spent most of his school days at this elite boarding school, in British society is considered a great privilege, but for him it's a *problem*.

Sam Barber:

I suffered emotionally; I was removed from my home, where I felt loved and brought to a place where it was all fear. There was no protection there, nowhere to go, nowhere you could feel safe.

Patricia Schäfer:

Like Sam, Susanna Hoare was also in a boarding school, in the sixties, which was normal amongst most of the elite. Her parents wanted the best for their daughter; but for Susanna, sent away at the age of 9, it was the beginning of many years of suffering.

Susanna Hoare:

I was completely desolate and alone. I felt abandoned, deeply wounded and isolated from my classmates. At a certain point I thought I couldn't bear it any more. So then I thought, well, the thing to do is, then, I am going to kill myself, and that way it'll all be over and I'll be free.

Patricia Schäfer:

No one noticed that the 13 year-old's suicide attempt. She started to drink and finally ended up with a heroin addiction. Not until she became an adult was she able to confront the trauma of her time at boarding school. Just like Sam. He feels unable to be in a relationship and fights with his self-worth. The roots of his problems, for him, lie in his time at boarding school.

Sam Barber:

This was saddest day of my life. I was eight years old, I couldn't understand why my parents who loved me wanted to send me away. The worst, the worst moment is when you stop crying, the moment the feeling stops, no matter how upset you are, and then you say: OK, I am used to it now.

Patricia Schäfer:

Psychotherapist Nick Duffell has been dealing with the damage that a life in boarding school can create for many years. His theory is that children have to develop a survival strategy to cope with these kinds of educational institutions.

Nick Duffell:

This survival means that you have to split off a part of your personality: feelings, spontaneity. As I said before, you can't develop emotional intelligence like that. Most of our ministers went to such schools, and in today's world we really need politicians who can take communal decisions. And boarding school survivors like David Cameron don't know what belonging *means*.

Patricia Schäfer:

Taunton School in Southwest England is one of 800 British private schools. Only the wealthy can afford the 40,000 Euros a year that the school cost. All the children eat lunch together

and two dozen of them board here. Rosie came here at the age of 5, two years ago. She only sees her parents once a month. Rosie learned very early to behave like a little adult, polite and forthcoming, patiently explaining things, even in front of the camera.

Rosie:

Right now we are practising our dribbling, because when we play against another school, which we do a lot, we want to show them how good we are at hockey.

Patricia Schäfer:

The days are full of activities. For each hobby there is also a course. Rosie is in the school choir as well as in the recorder band. In this way there's not much time for missing Mum and Dad. More than 80,000 British children live like Rosie, far away from home. Instead of the parents, a teacher couple cares for them, as 'house parents'.

Teacher:

There's always a few tears of homesickness but it doesn't take them long to then pick themselves back up. To keep them busy we get them playing football or doing a drawing to distract them, and in the end they're able to carry on as if the homesickness hasn't really been there.

Patricia Schäfer:

When the other children get picked up by their parents at the end of the day, Rosie goes to her room. Doesn't she get homesick?

Rosie:

I don't really. Er ... I just say goodbye to the others. No, ... it doesn't bother me.

Patricia Schäfer:

Rosie shares a room together with three other girls. Whether it is right to put 5-year-old children into boarding schools is a question that British society has not really asked itself until now. It just how things are done; for centuries it cemented the class system. Only a few 'out themselves' as victims of this system. One of the most prominent ones is Dickie Arbiter, long-time press secretary to the Queen. He was left at boarding school as a 6-year-old, and says it was much too early.

Dickie Arbiter:

It was grim, it was freezing; I cried my eyes out for the first nights in my bed. I was bullied straight away – brutally. I got through it, but only just.

Patricia Schäfer:

Such traumatic experiences are a matter of the past, says the British Boarding Schools Association. [www.boarding.org.uk] Nowhere can children be as well supported as in these elite schools.

Headmaster:

It's a far more supportive atmosphere than it ever was, and the schools are always in contact with the parents. I don't believe that today's children have to develop survival strategies or shut their feelings off; it's a thing of the past.

Patricia Schäfer:

But the best facilities can't make up for the separation from parents. Sam Barber wants to spare other children from experiencing what he did. He campaigns for raising the entrance age to these schools.

[see www.boardingschoolaction.wordpress.com]

Sam Barber:

I thought I could go to the school authorities for protection for my emotional needs, but as I was mistaken, the teachers were never there for me, nor were my parents.

Patricia Schäfer:

Boarding school promises Rosie and children like her a glittering career. What price many of them will pay they'll only discover many years later.