

James Foucar

At the end of September 2020 we learned, with sadness and a sense of shock, of the death of James Foucar. He died in his sleep of heart failure on 2nd August at the age of 58.

James started Boarding Concern in 2002, following a meeting with Nick Duffell. He put a great deal of time and effort into the organisation as it grew and flourished with more directors and many supporters.

His work over the years was the setting up of all things technical for the organisation and his commitment to raising awareness by presenting the problems that can arise when children are sent away to boarding school. For him, this particularly meant young children as he went to prep school when he was eight.

He started isolating himself from the other directors of Boarding Concern at the end of 2017 and this led on to him continuing alone with the organisation from July 2018 when his actions, at that time, made the work of the other directors impossible.

He continued on his own with Boarding Concern until his death, so this sad news of James brings with it too, the sad ending of the organisation.

Allison, Margaret, Paul and Sam
Directors of Boarding School Survivors – Support

The following are memories from people who worked with James:

It was a Saturday in the early noughties – before Joy Schaverien had astutely coined the phrase Boarding School Syndrome – and I had just done a day's presentation on the psychological problems of boarding. The central London hall was packed with counsellors and therapists eager to hear about this new idea, and, since I had only done something like this a couple of times before, I wasn't prepared for what

happened. Several of these so-called 'professional' attendees 'popped' about their own experiences as boarders and the dialogue needed to become more therapeutic than clinical.

At the end of the day, James Foucar, who had done the Boarding School Survivors workshop some months before, approached me and invited me for a coffee. It was clear to him, he let me know, that some kind of organisation for ex-boarders was necessary, and today's experience was proof of that.

We decided there and then to form the Association for Boarding School Survivors, ABSS later morphed into Boarding Concern which developed a stunning website and lively annual conferences.

James had an eye for detail and immediately assumed a managerial role. Since he was interested in boarding as a phenomenon, he was always busy reporting on the latest developments at school level and attendance statistics. I was more interested in the watchdog potential, and other directors were keen to promote support for former boarders. With these different agenda, it was perhaps inevitable that it wasn't to be plain sailing.

What could not be predicted, however, that eventually James would want to go his own way and seize control of the organisation without any warning. Unfortunately this turned out to be easy to accomplish since he was alone in having access to the necessary company websites. Amongst other problems, this meant for me that no bursaries could be awarded to struggling would-be workshop participants.

What motivated James to sabotage the joint project is hard to say, but he was badly wounded by his boarding experience. James's tragically early and unexpected death makes anything I could say about this pure speculation, but it reminds me that we must look out for those who got crushed by their early boarding experience and remember that it is impossible to recover from this on one's own. Being a loner, he was not able to work his trauma through in the medium of a loving relationship, nor to my knowledge did he ever commit to a full therapeutic one.

I choose to remember James's early enthusiasm and go-for-it energy.

Nick Duffell

It is sad that James Foucar died on August 2nd. He was only 58 years old and still had much life to live.

I met him in 2004 and worked closely with him for five years at Boarding Concern, an organisation that supports boarding school survivors. Like him, I was a Director of Boarding Concern and was part of a small team that ran the organisation, producing newsletters, running conferences, setting up and overseeing a website as well as dealing with day-to-day admin and financial management.

James was always involved in everything and was a valued colleague. I shall miss him and his energy. I remember that, at the first meeting I attended, James brought with him a small suitcase of books, newspapers and articles. Suffice it to say that you would now need more than a small suitcase to hold all that has been written, filmed and reported about the psychological and social effects of boarding school.

I last saw James at two conferences – at the University of Brighton in 2017 and at the Boarding Concern Conference in Euston in April 2018. He seemed to be his usual energetic and helpful self.

Sadly in July 2018 he decided to run Boarding Concern on his own. Many of us tried to get him to reconsider and all sorts of attempts were made to arrange some sort of reconciliation. But they came to nothing. This was a great pity as James effectively alienated himself from very many colleagues and friends at a time in his life when he most probably needed our support.

So, in remembering James, I prefer to dwell on the many years of hard work and overall support that he contributed to the movement to keep shining a light on the neglect and abuse of young children who are sent to boarding schools, when often only seven or eight years old. His decision to go his own way for the last two years of his life was, I feel, a bad one. But knowing James, he will have had his reasons for his decision and he, of course, will have had a steadfast belief that what he was doing was the right thing.

His Prep School, St Aubyn's in Rottingdean (now closed) is a three-mile walk along the seafront from where I live, and I will always remember James each time I do that walk and arrive at the High Street. James once told me that on his re-visiting of St Aubyn's for an open day long after he had left, he found in the library pictures of his former headmaster as a young man, visiting Bavaria in 1936 to celebrate Hitler's birthday. James politely pointed out to the librarian that they should be removed.

For himself, it gave him a greater insight into his abusive treatment at the school as a very young boy in the early 1970s.

Thurstine Basset

I had been introduced to James through the Boarding School Survivor network and agreed to be one of the founding members and Directors of a new organisation that was to build on the ground-breaking work of Nick Duffell. I started writing and editing a newsletter, and, by the end of 2002, alongside Kevin Garrod and Mark Hill, we had set up the company and adopted the name I had created for the newsletter, Boarding Concern.

I remember James as an enthusiastic, energetic and dogmatic man who inspired others to come on board a growing movement. In his role as Secretary he was meticulous in the preparation of documentation and steered us successfully through those early days of incorporation. It was clear that he was intensely, personally dedicated to the work and so it would prove over the years as his pursuit of justice for others clearly mirrored his own struggles for clarity.

Ironically, as the movement gained more public recognition, more cases being brought to justice and more evidence and research being published on the subject, I sadly witnessed his retreat into a unilateralist position which only served to isolate him from allies and colleagues.

My fondest memory of James will be at the conferences when he used to take charge of the technicals to ensure microphones and technology were working so that everyone's voices could be heard properly. Maybe giving those previously unheard voices a public platform will prove to be the most poignant but most long-lasting part of his legacy.

Thank you James for all your endeavours and may you rest in peace.

Gordon Knott