

# **FAREWELL TO THE JACK PETCHEY FOUNDATION**

**- Barbara Staines**

Life changed for me in 1980. Having two small children, I was finding it difficult to juggle their school life, after-school care and the journeys to central London where I worked in a demanding job at IBM. So I decided to seek employment more locally, and soon answered an advertisement for a personal secretary to Jack Petchey in a small office a 5 minute walk from home. "Petchey" was a household name in Newham, there being Petchey Car Hire at East Ham Station and Petchey Car Sales sites in the borough as well. You only had to pick up a local newspaper to see pages of advertisements with the well known Petchey logo on them.

I was interviewed by the Accountant of the company and was advised that Jack Petchey was a hard task-master and a perfectionist. Great! Someone after my own heart! However, it was nothing short of a miracle that I kept the job – within the first week I had managed to send off several hundred letters with zero postage on the franking slips (they were all returned by the Post Office), and I also managed to erase the first dictation tape that had taken some hours to prepare and had to be re-dictated for me to transcribe!

A disastrous start but somehow I was forgiven for both errors and I then determined to bring the company – maybe kicking and screaming – into the modern era. I had been given an old manual typewriter to use, and having worked with computers for some years, this seemed like an archaic way to run a business. However, Jack Petchey's business ethics and mine were a world apart! As an astute businessman, he saved every penny and if this meant using up the black & red ribbon of the typewriter until it was grey and pink, then so be it. However, I succeeded in persuading the Accountant to modernize the office equipment and between us we programmed a small computer and we were on our way into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century! Luckily Jack embraced technology from then on and became an avid advocate of Google and later on Facebook, having realized the advantages of social media, and the amazing use that young people made of it.

I soon learned that one of Jack Petchey's goals was to "give back to society" and one of my duties was to raise funds. I realized that it wasn't easy to persuade people to part with their hard earned cash! I'm sure a lot of people suddenly remembered urgent appointments or were "out" whenever I called! We ran several charity fundraising activities in aid of local good causes, and never missed an opportunity

to raise money, mainly at the yearly parties held for Jack Petchey's birthdays – great fun as we incorporated fancy dress, and trips down the River Thames, with mini casinos with the winnings being donated to good causes. Nights at the Walthamstow Dogs Stadium were a great way of raising money, having persuaded celebrities to circulate round the crowds with donation buckets! All this may seem like “small change” now, but every penny donated helped someone in need.

Jack's family had always been accustomed to his 50/50 philosophy, and he used the same way of giving – encouraging the charities to fund-raise a certain amount, and then he would donate an equal amount. It worked a treat.

Jack's empire had expanded to industrial estates and a beautiful holiday complex on the beach in the Algarve, Portugal, where the staff ran parties for the local orphanage. All visits by Jack and the office staff to the complex were accompanied by bags of English sweets, treats for the children, donated clothes and spectacles which were always more than gratefully received. Even now the Jack Petchey Foundation supports the orphanage and there are plans afoot to build a bigger, better one with more modern facilities.

Many holidays at the resort were given as prizes in the huge raffles run to raise money to build a hydrotherapy pool in the Mile End Hospital and to fund a kidney dialysis unit. Jack had for years made large donations to Dr. Barnardo's Homes and the Boy Scouts but it became apparent that it was time to set up a separate Foundation, designed to give young people self esteem, and to encourage them, too, to use the 50/50 ideal. Jack always maintained that there was so much good in young people – they just needed people to believe in them, or opportunities to shine. They needed youth clubs, sports clubs, dozens of different interests to be catered for from acting to public speaking. Jack also believed that youth needed mentors – similar to the people he looked up to when he was a boy growing up in East London who gave him sound business advice. He was determined that his experience would help keep young people off the streets and be given a good start in life. Jack's donations continued to grow, as did the number of clubs, schools and organisations that participated in the schemes.

So twenty-one years ago the Jack Petchey Foundation was born and a Board of Trustees were appointed to ensure that the work could grow and spread and that the core ideals were never forgotten. It was a testament to many, many loyal staff whose hard work and dedication has ensured that thousands of teenagers and young adults have benefited from the Jack Petchey Achievement Awards, Leader

Awards and myriad volunteering schemes, to name but a few of Jack's innovative concepts that have helped young people reach their full potential. I am certain that hundreds of lives have been enriched by the assistance given by the Jack Petchey Foundation, and this will continue long into the future.

Over the years my children grew up, both of them worked within the Petchey Group at some point and my younger son collaborated with Jack to write his successful "50/50 Man – The Jack Petchey Story". And what a success story it has been – over 90 years of motivation, hard work and philanthropic ideals – hardly any wonder Jack was awarded firstly the OBE, then the CBE and his Knighthood – a legend in his time!

I have watched the Foundation grow into a wonderful organization with the young people of London & Essex at its heart, but now realise that having long reached retirement age, now is the time for someone with more youthful ideas and energy to take my place on the Board. I shall, of course, watch the Foundation grow with interest and wish everyone who works there – and its Founder, Sir Jack, a fond farewell. His catchphrase is "If you think you can, you can". Well he thought he could, and he did! He is an inspiration to us all and he taught me a lot!