

Swiss Cottage Library Oral History Summary

Interviewee: Nicole Charlet

Date of Birth: 1947

Parent's Occupations:

Interview Location: Swiss Cottage Library

Interviewer: Helen. Summariser: William Fowler

Nicole moved to Belsize Park, London from France in the 1970s and has been visiting Swiss Cottage Library since the 1980/90s.

Nicole won a 'secret reader' prize issued by SCL by submitting a photograph of herself perched in a tree, by Hampstead Heath ponds reading a book. On visiting, she appreciated the library's 'magnificent', Corbusier-like design. She uses various amenities in the Camden district, volunteers at the 'Food for All' van in Kentish Town and thinks of SCL as part of the rich, community-focused fabric of the area. She gets on well with the staff and singles out Amy who makes papier mâché art works and helps Nicole with the use of the computers while she waits for a cataract operation.

Nicole's use of the library has changed over the years. She has variously used the books, newspapers and the computers. The sheet music collection and music books have been important to Nicole as she used to be in a choir. She speaks poetically about SWL describing it as 'cathedral of knowledge and wisdom, a place of quiet' and remarks 'it is essential for a human being to have a place like this'. She has a poetic way with words and yet the library is very much part of everyday life for Nicole. She has not noticed any great changes in the fabric of the building over the decades but does remark on the arrival of solar panels. She worked at the Camden News Journal during Covid and was considered a key worker, enabling her to visit the library which she says was like a graveyard. She was sad to see so few visitors in the building.