



Lynda Waltho, Labour's Member of Parliament for Stourbridge and Assistant Regional Minister for the West Midlands talks to Raring2go.

You had a teaching career before becoming an MP, but what job did you really want to do when you were at school?

I did actually want to teach! I have always loved school and reading in particular. I loved books – even before I could read them properly. The school librarian was a very big influence on me. She opened up my imagination to new worlds by suggesting new books for me to read. Even now I can devour a book in a day! That's why libraries are a passion of mine, and the fight to keep local libraries open.

What memories of days out do you have from when you were a child?

I used to love going to the park, taking a picnic, and building dens. Nowadays, children don't play freely on their own as much as we did, because of all sorts of parental concerns. Parental involvement in children's play is important but so is letting children play on their own. By climbing trees you learn about taking risks – it's character building.

Your children enjoy sport – how important is leading an active life for children?

Very! My children follow in their father's footsteps – he is very active. James and Joe both love football. Sundays are taken up ferrying them between matches. Last year they took part in the three peaks challenge for Mary Stevens Hospice and the Orchard Partnership. It was physically tough and it gave them a sense of pride, but also taught them about helping those less fortunate. Sport isn't just about staying healthy but it helps your personal development too. I do worry that when budgets get tight it is often the provision of children's facilities that get cut. With today's concerns over anti social behaviour and obesity, children's services are the last thing we should cut. That's why I campaigned against the closing of Brierley Hill swimming baths. I get upset when I see budgetary decisions affect-



ing people's day to day lives.

What are your favourite local places to visit as a family?

When the boys were younger, they used to love going to Mary Stevens Park in Stourbridge – they learnt to ride their bikes there.

A favourite place to picnic was the **Severn Valley Country Park**. Both the boys were into Thomas The Tank Engine so loved to watch the steam train go past.

We used to enjoy taking them to the **Butterfly Farm in Stratford** – what a great place! The boys adored it there. Whenever we had visitors stay with us, we would always take them to the Butterfly Farm. James and Joe loved the way the butterflies come up close and sit on your hand.

They would be totally enamoured by it.

What key issues do you think children face today?

Childcare is still a big issue. I fought for more flexible childcare a while ago before it became fashionable to do so. I think the free places for children under 3 is a fantastic development but there is always more to be done. Because there are more female MPs now, these issues are getting pushed further up the agenda.

Women can bring a practical perspective to politics. For example, women know what a pain it is to push a pram around Stourbridge High Street – we can give a sense of urgency to day to day issues such as pedestrianisation. Women are often able to empathise well and this is what makes them good MPs.

Because I live in Stourbridge, and my children go to school in Stourbridge I see the affects of political decisions in my day to day life. I am a 'doer' by nature, so the idea that I can get things done and make a difference does appeal to me. Stourbridge is a great community with a lot of good stuff going on. Often the best part of my job is just putting people in touch with each other. The people of Stourbridge are genuinely pleased if you are able to help - It's so lovely when people come up to me to say 'thank you'.

Linda is married to Steve and has two children, James who is 18 and Joe, 14. Linda was elected as a Member of Parliament in 2005 and splits her time between London and her home in Stourbridge.