

A Fortuitous Chain of Events

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I think I must have met Peggy Morgan first at Westminster College in 1991 but not in a teaching and learning situation because although I was doing my PGCE it was in Early Years Education rather than in a specific subject. However, I had been studying Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Tokyo and it had been suggested that I introduced myself to Peggy and request some materials.

Our first real meeting however, was after I had returned to Lampeter. Professor Cyril Williams former president of the British Association for the Study of Religions who was always keen to help, advised me that the BASR conference was to be held at the University of Wales, Lampeter and that I should get in touch with Peggy Morgan and offer to be a local coordinator.

You may wonder why this necessitated an immediate visit to Wendy Dossett. The answer is simple despite our difference in age we were contemporaries in the Department of Religious Studies and being poverty-stricken students, we shared an “interview suit” that had been made for me as a gesture of gratitude by the mother of an overseas student I’d helped with English. Wendy and I found the outfit extremely useful. In hindsight, I expect it looked very homemade. Yet at our official meeting Peggy admired the bow on the skirt; just enough of a compliment to initiate conversation and put me at ease.

My next encounter with Peggy, in the summer of 2000 was in her capacity as Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, when she brought the RERC library from Oxford to Lampeter. No move is easy and unpacking books is heavy work, which I believe Peggy did. However, when the work of shelf-ordering, stock-taking and catalogue-updating commenced, it would clearly be easier with one person at the computer and another up the ladder. Fortunately for me, Peggy remembered that I was nearby. Working with Peggy was the best training anyone could have for a role. Peggy gave a description or explanation about the author, content, donor or circumstance of writing of each book I handled, as she input the data. It was clear that the Centre was important to her and that I must give it and its members the same respect and concern as she did. Peggy returned to Oxford and I was left, initially, with processing her

correspondence. This grew into the post of librarian and administrator until two additional members of staff were employed.

Peggy retired as director of RERC and Wendy Dossett inherited responsibility for the MA Religious Experience. In 2010, with redundancies looming my concern for the RERC was extreme and then we learned that Bettina Schmidt who had transferred from Bangor to Lampeter would be its next director. What a relief. My next two librarian posts were in Oxford. Typically of Peggy she acknowledged my presence and introduced me to the colleges with which she had connections, took me to various lectures and shared her favourite walks with me. My own professional links with Oxford have disappeared, yet Peggy kept in touch. Our most recent get together in 2019 was when we went to visit Irene Williams, the widow of Prof Cyril Williams, now in her late 90s, who lives near Carmarthen. Then came COVID-19, a time of lockdown and isolation, but not loneliness. Through the letterbox regularly dropped one of Peggy's recognisable handmade notelets with greetings, news and an interesting cutting from something she had read; followed soon after by a phone call from Irene Williams saying how thrilled she had been to receive a letter from Peggy. That great and time-giving skill and gift of Peggy's, to bring people together, was thriving in adverse circumstances.

I thank Peggy for her professionalism and friendship also Wendy, Andy and Bettina, for facilitating my contribution to this celebration of Peggy's career whilst I do not have access to a word processor or the Internet because of the Coronavirus pandemic. Now that I have retired, I look forward to future social and leisure activities shared with Peggy.

At a business development course I once attended, the benefits of networking were extolled but as a way for one's own financial gain. Apart from the academic and practical things I learned from Peggy, I experienced the joy and pleasure shared by genuine heartfelt networking. I hope that I am able in some way to live up to Peggy's admirable example.