

Margaret

I first saw Margaret as she arrived late for a Christian Union talk at Freshers' Week in the Southampton Students Union. I was a second-year student on door duty that afternoon, and Margaret was about to start her Aeronautics and Astronautics degree course. Typically, she refused to walk further into the lecture theatre (she would have attracted attention!) but plonked herself down on the floor by the door.

I did not see much of Margaret for some time after that (she was a rare thing in those days as a female engineering student) and anyway Margaret was in a different department. Our paths crossed from time to time at Christian Union meetings, but that was all.

The following spring, we got to know each other a little better and I discovered that Margaret was always smiling, often slow to speak out, but when she did it was worth listening to. Margaret enjoyed being outdoors and she often took the initiative suggesting that we go for a walk somewhere. Only later did I learn of her love of gardening – which began when she was as young as four- at the allotment with her Dad. Margaret liked to grow her own vegetables and then scoff at the prices in the shops. She also liked brightly coloured flowers. Throughout our lives together Margaret seemed unable to sleep on a Saturday night if she had not got a soil under her nails earlier in the day.

I also found that she was a committed Christian and she spent much of her spare time at Southampton assisting at Orchard Lane Church Sunday School. This was in one of the poorer parts of Southampton and it was typical of Margaret to home in on things that she could do for those less fortunate than herself. I also found that she did not like arriving early for anything, and she that had a love for a very noisy plastic coat. Margaret also could not sit still for very long, often fidgeting in that noisy coat.

Margaret graduated at a time when engineers and aero engineers especially, were not in demand. We had seen the RB211 crisis and the Aero industry was not recruiting. She trained as a teacher and took up her position at Knighton Fields Road Junior School. A memory from that time is from 1975 when we both walked the Coast to Coast Walk – it was a sizzling summer that year. We were camped at Reeth and Margaret was reading through Wainwright's book about the walk. Suddenly she exploded with indignation when she read that Wainwright had not done the walk as a single trip but done it in stages with the help of friends ferrying him to and from the start and finish of each day. She reminded me of this every time the walking got a little difficult!

In 1976, we moved to Wheelock, living in a house called Tether's End on Zan Drive; and joined this Church. Margaret taught at Bignal End Junior

School in Audley. She assisted with the Sunday School, qualified as a local preacher and she served on the Plan with enthusiasm, particularly enjoying visits to the smaller chapels.

Around this time Margaret decided to pursue her long held earlier fascination with the Law and after a conversation with another teacher she embarked on a part-time Law degree at the North Staffordshire Polytechnic. 5 years of hard work and many very late nights of study later led to her Honours Law degree and she started work as a Solicitor at Sproston Slaney and Swan in Newcastle. She quickly warmed to working with families in crisis, and got really upset when one couple appeared more concerned about who would get the Doulton figures than who would look after the children.

A series of events forced Margaret into setting up her own firm, Cluley & Co, in Winsford. This was a reluctant move, Margaret only ordered 250 letter heads and 100 business cards, convinced that her business would flounder and fail in months. In fact, 25 years later, it was illness that brought the firm to an end. It was round this time when she upset a car salesman who ignored Margaret's description of the vehicle she was after and instead set off describing all the wonderful features available. Imagine his dismay when Margaret asked, "But how much would it cost without all that stuff, and why do I have to have a radio?"

Her work in Winsford was typical of her generosity, focussing mainly on serving those who could not afford to pay privately. Much of the time, Margaret did Legal Aid work, eventually being asked to serve on the Legal Aid Board Appeals panel. I remember her delight when she was told that her expenses for serving on those panels were calculated using the same rates as those used for judges.

When Legal Aid was severely curtailed and then removed for the work she was doing with families she responded by running £5.00 or £10.00/week contribution plans for clients and doing a significant amount for nothing. Margaret helped so many clients in Winsford that it was impossible to go into the main shopping area in Winsford with her without meeting someone "Oh that just one of my clients". What had started out as a quick trip to the shop became a protracted conversation updating Margaret on the minutiae of that person's life.

Working as a solicitor meant that Margaret was usually wearing a lot of black to work, especially when appearing at court. I recall endless traipsing around shops for the right skirt. This was at odds with her own preference for bright colours. Pretty frocks and skirts were the norm along with a definite affection for teddy bears. Margaret drew immense pleasure from simple things: sitting by an open fire, burning the toast on the open

fire, crusty bread with marmite while watching Poirot, riffling her fingers through a newly opened ream of paper.

Margaret has supported things she believed in generously over the years, giving time, money and herself unstintingly. When we visited our Wycliffe Bible Translator friends in Nigeria she loved every minute of it. It was typical of her that the visit we made to a refuge for mothers and children cast out of their homes because of AIDS was the part she found most heart-breaking and enjoyable at the same time.

Margaret also liked travelling and we went on enough cruises together to become Platinum travellers with Cunard, but she regularly caused utter consternation when she asked for the salmon without the sauce the chef had lovingly prepared for the preceding 2 hours.

It was on the QE2 that Margaret decided that she would like to learn how to dance. We went to dance classes, argued, practised and eventually gained Bronze, Silver and Gold Medals. We had a go at a small competition and the rest is history. Dancing has proved to be simultaneously a real challenge and release for Margaret. A challenge because to dance in competitions attention to detail and moving with discipline, grace and elegance are all required at the same time as looking confident and relaxed. Our dance teacher has often said "No, not that left foot, the other left foot"

In September 2006 Margaret was taken by ambulance to Leighton Hospital, where she was in Intensive Care for 5 days. Her mother and I spent many hours at her bedside; no-one knew what was wrong and things looked very bleak. When Margaret came around some of her first words were "Tell Richard to bring Fred Bear and my hair brush". When I did turn up with them I was asked why I had cancelled the holiday!

It emerged after several weeks that Margaret was suffering from Cryptogenic Cirrhosis of the Liver. Following a referral to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham it became clear that there were several options. At the initial Transplant assessment, it was decided that Margaret was already handling the condition well and that a transplant was not necessary straight away. The dancing contributed to Margaret's continued health and was thoroughly approved of by the medical team.

On November 19th, 2013 Margaret eventually had a Liver Transplant following 12 months of misery coping with a gradually failing liver. 6 weeks after the transplant she was back on the dance floor, and within 3 months we were competing again. It is a tribute to Margaret's hard work and renewed health that last Autumn we took part in the National Championships at Blackpool and at Easter we danced again at Blackpool in the European Championships. Last year we were asked by our village

sports and social club to teach them how to dance. Margaret promptly asked our dance teachers who they could recommend doing it and was shocked when they replied, "You can". She will be sorely missed by that group.

Having been forced to close Cluley & Co due to her earlier illness, Margaret would not rest on her laurels and set about looking for other ways she could be helpful, eventually working as a volunteer with Age UK. She was particularly thrilled when she was given a part-time permanent position with them. Once again, her work was characterised by dedication to helping others without considering the cost to herself. I know for a fact that she worked far more hours than she was paid for!

In late May this year Margaret started to feel tired and we had to miss some of our favourite competitions. On returning from our regular week in Vilamoura in Portugal, Margaret presented herself at the QE Hospital Liver Clinic. Their exhaustive set of tests diagnosed Post Transplant Lymphoproliferative Disorder. Typically, Margaret agreed to participate in a Medical Trial of a treatment that, if successful, would remove the need for chemotherapy.

The last few weeks were painful for Margaret, but she tried to keep going and only now has it become clear that she spent a lot of her time finishing things off so that there was no legal work outstanding.

We all have our own memories of Margaret. They will usually feature bright colours, smiles, a sympathetic ear and a few well-chosen words gently spoken to help. A lover of teddy bears, sunshine and her garden, she was a hard and fast worker, persistent and painstaking, always championing the cause of the less privileged.

Her life was truly a life of giving to and for others.