

Margery Ord

There can be downcast eyes and a heaviness to one's step approaching a funeral. There is none of that in the few personal reflections I want to share today. Rather, and in the words of David Hawkins' poem:

You can shed tears that she is gone
Or you can smile because she has lived.

In my case, that smile, a quizzical one with a raised eyebrow, comes first from remembering a morning in, I'm almost sure, 1980. As will be obvious, I was younger then. It was, I think, the first time I entered the Principal's office, occupied at the time by Duncan Stewart who had, somewhat incongruously for those who knew him, been my 'moral tutor' as a Wadham undergraduate in 1969. I was accompanied by Dick, that is Sir Richard, Southwood, later Vice Chancellor, and my academic godfather. In Duncan's office we were greeted by Wilma Crowther, LMH's Tutorial Fellow in Biology who, three years earlier had examined my doctoral thesis and for reasons I did not fully understand then or now, had formed a remarkable loyalty to me, and beside her sat a woman, with kind smile, sharp eyes, slightly breathless and grey pudding-bowl haircut. I had no idea who she was when I entered the room, and nor when I left it, because Duncan introduced her that inaudible academic mumble that leaves one no wiser. I did not know who she was – of course, you all can guess – but I soon knew what she was: she was incisive, and kind, probing, and humorous. On that occasion she made me smile, a little quizzically, with an eyebrow slightly, playfully, raised, as thinking about her does today.

That was the occasion when, urged by Wilma Crowther, and more or less instructed by Margery Ord – for it was, of course, she - Duncan Stewart agreed in principle to establishing at LMH, what would be the first senior research post in wildlife conservation in any university in the world. It is a long, different, and often amusing story for another day how it took us til 1986 to turn that theory into practice, and create the Fellowship that I still hold, and thus to create the institute, the WildCRU, in which Margery took relentless interest, and I believe some pride, over the ensuing forty years. She even, and I was not supposed to know, put some of her own money where my mouth is. However, the story for today is that, from that first encounter, Margery fluttered loyally around me, whisperingly offering sage, often wickedly humorous, advice on how to understand, and outwit, even to bend, Oxford's endless rules.

Margery was the last of that remarkable quartet, Duncan, Wilma and Dick are long dead, but I owe them my lifetime at LMH, and LMH owes them, and Margery as much as any, whatever pride it takes in being the academic home of the WildCRU. Last week I tallied my doctoral students: 136 so far – the great majority has been at LMH; and my international diploma students, the so called WildCRU Panthers, 92 of them, and every single one at LMH.

For Margery at least, a benefit of WildCRU's global remit, was her inexhaustible curiosity about the far flung countries in which we work – many of which she determinedly, indeed bravely, visited herself. For forty years our conversations ended in the same duetting exchange: 'go well' said she, 'keep smiling' said I. and I say it again.

So, with these reflections I do not rage against the dying of the light, rather, I smile, perhaps even chuckle, at the memory of a remarkable character and a loyal friend.

David W. Macdonald