

EDP WI WEEK 7th December

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## **My WI Journey**

Just before my 40th birthday, I moved house. I moved into a village in a completely different area of Norfolk. Little did I know how that move was going to change my life. Every month a lady from the village came around with the local village magazine and every month she tried to persuade me to join the WI. I would get to meet the ladies in the village at least.

My WI journey began: I joined and enjoyed the monthly meetings. The speakers were informed and interesting, the demonstrations looked so simple until I tried for myself. There were lots of events organised by the Federation. In particular, I noticed a two-day public speaking course. I just could not make the dates due to work commitments. However, never arrange anything in a remote village hall in Norfolk in February. The second day of the proposed course it snowed heavily and the course had to be cancelled. The replacement date, I was able to make and 12 of us met in the same remote village hall and not only learnt a lot from our lovely tutor but also enjoyed ourselves. Wherever my WI journey took me after that I was never afraid to talk to large groups of people.

Not long after joining my WI I joined the committee. As a very new WI, we sometimes wondered about the paperwork that came from the Federation Office so when a paper came round asking for people to be nominated for the Federation Executive none of us really had any idea what that would entail. I was invited to WI House to observe some committee meetings and began to understand more of how the WI worked. I stood for election and was not elected but a few months later I was co-opted to the committee This started my journey through the Federation, first as a committee member, then as Federation Treasurer and finally Federation Chairman. In between, I organised the Royal Norfolk Show marquee for a number of years, made a lot of friends and went on visits to Denman College. I was Chairman in 2000 which proved to be a pivotal year. The WI took over the Theatre Royal for a day and in the evening put on a show, Never Flippin' Well In, with members taking part. Members planted the Harnser Wood at Elsing with the help of the Woodland Trust. I went to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party, closely followed by a Federation visit to Denman where I met the man I was later to marry.

Having completed my time with the Federation, I chose to stand for election to the National Board of Trustees. I was there for the introduction of WI Life magazine. The magazine was not universally welcome so I spent days visiting Federations to explain how useful the magazine was going to be. That early public speaking training came in very useful. During my time on the Board, I was National Treasurer for five years. I also visited the factory where the WI jam was going to be made as well as the biscuit factory to taste samples for the WI biscuits. I didn't know it was possible to get fed up with tasting biscuits but it really is. For a few years, I was also on the rota of members who wrote for the EDP.

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My WI journey has meant spending a lot of time on trains, meeting people in different parts of the country and making lots of friends. One of the straplines used by the WI is, 'The WI is what you make of it' – it can also make you a different person if you take the opportunities on offer.