

EDP Weekend Dec7 Mobbs v3.doc

EDP WI WEEK 7th December

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Opportunities Beyond my Expectations

Out of the blue in the early nineties, I received a call from Michael Pollitt, the then Agricultural Editor of the EDP. My name was given to him as a prospective writer for the WI Weekly column featured in the EDP's Farm & Country section, I was sure he'd got the wrong person, but they wanted a younger member's point of view, and I apparently fitted the bill.

I was in my mid-twenties with two young children when I joined the WI and was just beginning to find my feet around the county. I am not a Norfolk girl by birth but I was learning so much about my new home; meeting wonderful friends through becoming a member, attending lots of county events and I was hungry to learn more. The invitation to join three of my fellow WI members as a columnist was exciting and a great honour. I thought my English master would be very proud of me, he always said I liked to put my opinion across!

The request came with guidelines, 650 words to reflect my WI life to be delivered to Rouen Road on the Friday morning before publication on Saturday and I haven't stopped writing since. From that moment I researched; read everything I could about the WI, its history, the latest news and views, what was happening up in London and down in Oxfordshire at our very own Denman College. I sought out members who had years of experience and gauged public opinion on their views of the WI in Norfolk.

As time moved on so did the technology that began to grace our homes. My neighbour kindly offered to fax my articles on Friday mornings, it saved me so much time. Next came our first computer and I was flying! Then we progressed to dial-up internet, all was good until one day the computer crashed. My relationship with Mr Sugar's amazing piece of technology came to an end and my 650 words disappeared into the ether. Good job I had plenty of ink in my pen! Next, we invested in the most up-to-date computer and dial-up was a memory, but as we all know the internet can be a beast and several times I've had to make alternative arrangements, but I have never missed a Saturday!

Our move to Norfolk coincided with me becoming motherless, to add to my bereavement just four months later my son was born with a severe disability, so there were some pretty tough times ahead of me. I am sure I have mentioned before that at my first meeting the speaker was from CAB, I felt so lucky that night (being so new to my role as a carer). I didn't realise there was so much support available for families like us. One thing I did discover that evening was a momentous change that had taken place following a victory in the European Courts by carer Jackie Drake who had won the case giving married women and men the right to claim Carers Allowance. Many of us were awarded a large sum in back pay which changed life dramatically for many carers. For me personally, I felt if I hadn't gone along to that meeting I would not have known about it for a long time to come,

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so I wanted to give something back to the organisation that had welcomed me and opened my eyes.

The following year I joined the Norfolk Federation Executive; became the Press & Publicity Officer (a role which lasted twenty years), the Editor of the Gazette, I represented the WI on the Rural Community Council and became a judge for the Pride in Norfolk Awards. I even walked the red carpet at the premiere of Calendar Girls in Leicester Square - a memorable night. I was given opportunities beyond my expectations. But, most importantly to me, is the incredible support and amazing friends that I have made on this WI journey.