

Speech for Mayor Making Day, Monday 10 July 2010

Last year when I proposed Liz Hodgkin as Mayor of this town I knew she was going to be a good Mayor – I had no idea she would be such a great mayor – Liz has been totally proactive, energetic, involved in everything the town has thrown at her and lots of things she had done off her own bat. She has revived races – i.e. pancakes & forced us to have fun all in the name of supporting her favourite charities AND latterly she became an impresario. Britain in Bloom has not suffered on jot, the standards are raised annually – under Liz' leadership we were successful once again in the Regional competition and Liz is still working hard - adding to her success by organising the Henley Flower Festival from May 16th. And now I have the temerity to try and fill her shoes.

HELP!!

I know that I have the support of a fantastic team, from our new Deputy Mayor, Chris Pye, Liz, and the other Councillors, and all the staff who work behind the scenes at Henley Town Council, who like me, are committed to serving the people of this great town. I am very lucky to have our excellent Town Clerk, Mike Kennedy, to turn to. Mike, I am grateful to you for all the support you have given me to date and hope to continue to benefit from your guidance and extensive experience.

Unfortunately the Senior Administrator, Adrienne Gliddon is retiring at the end of this month. Adrienne has been my comfort blanket and svengali since I first became a councillor in 2007 – how I shall miss her calmness, her guidance and her friendship. I am sure every Councillor and ex-councillor here today will want to join me in wishing her a long and happy retirement. I should also like to thank Laura Pye for her support as my Deputy as Chair of "Town and Community", firstly for her constant whispered reminders of saying "All in Favour" and for standing in for me when I could not be present at one council and at the Annual Town Meeting. She did a marvellous job on both occasions.

Now, I have a confession; I was not born in Henley, I was **not** born in Henley neither did I go to school with Ken Arlett, Terry Buckett nor Chris Pye, I attended Grange Grammar school for Girls!

1977 was a memorable year in many ways. It was the year of Queen Elizabeth II's Silver jubilee; Jimmy Carter succeeded Gerald Ford to become 39th President of USA; Star Wars premiered on the big screen; Pele played his last professional game, Red Rum won the Grand National for a third time and it was the year that Elvis died. For a young family from the North of England, it was also the year of new beginnings. 33 years ago, my husband Barry and I, and our two small children, Adam and Caroline, arrived in Henley-on-Thames with hopes of finding a home

and settling down. After what had felt like an eternity, travelling around Bucks + Berks, being gazumped on every house we liked the look of, we had almost given up all hope of finding anywhere decent to live. We arrived in Henley-on-Thames and took a room for the night at the Little White Hart on the Riverside. When we awoke the next morning and looked out of the window - a mist was hanging over the river, the sun was fighting to get through the haze and the leaves were turning a gentle shade of gold on the far bank – we had found our nirvana and that day we saw not one but 3 houses on the market which we could afford and this time we weren't gazumped – it was meant to be. And here, except for a brief return to Leeds for 18 months, we have remained very happily and have very much proved wrong our friends in the north who who advised us "not to go down there – no one would speak to us, very unfriendly – that close to London, no one knows their neighbours, don't do it love –"

On the day we actually moved into our new home in Henley, we travelled via Slough which meant coming down Remenham Hill past the Cricket Club, Barry pulled in and there we found a man driving a tractor around the pitch. That wonderful man, we now know as Steve Stevens was so welcoming to all of us and we thought well, if everyone is as nice as him in Henley, we should enjoy ourselves here and so it was to be. On leaving the cricket Club we drove in over the bridge and for the first time enjoyed that particular Henley phenomena of coming over the bridge, giving a sigh of relief and thinking aah, I am home! I have been that same 'safe' feeling when incoming over the bridge for the past 33 years!

I was born in Sheffield on Saturday 1st of June, into a very loving Christian family. The year is unimportant, as I shall never ever admit to being over 49 and even that number burns my

tongue! I was given a foundation of strong moral values, by which I have lived my life I have true Yorkshire grit, determined to finish whatever I start, and I am very careful with money – mine & YOURS!. As a Saturday's child, I've worked hard for my living, and if you believe in horoscopes, you'd say that I am a typical Gemini, adaptable and sociable, if you believe in Chinese horoscopes I was born in a year of the Dog which makes me very loyal. Happily I was about , ready and waiting for the birth of Rock n roll-wonderful!

I have lived in many different places during my life. My family moved to Bombay, where I very happily spent my formative years and enjoyed learning of the many different cultures which abound there. I returned to England as a teenager, in the swinging 60's. I met and eventually married one Barry George Wood - whom I think you all know. Marrying a Nuclear Physicist, I should have known that things would be explosive! After our first year of marriage when Barry had finished his research in NMR and gained his Phd we to Swansea. We knew no one at all and didn't speak the language. Despite that, we made good and strong friendships that have stood the test of time – some of our dear Welsh friends are here with us today. We a very happy 4 years in Swansea where we were blessed with the birth of our son Adam. We moved to the midlands where Caroline was born. And from there to Leeds from where in 1977 we moved to Henley.

NOT being born in Henley gives one a certain advantage - one must have lived in at least one other place therefore instead of taking the town for granted one realises what a wonderful place is Henley-on-Thames and what a privilege it is to live here.

How wonderful to find a village mentality in a town - I always felt my children were safe here – and here everyone speaks to everyone and where it takes hours to get around the supermarket because you keep bumping into people you know – you have difficulty not meeting someone you know in a day – it is wonderful! I always have to smile when strangers / tourists comment on the fact that in "posh" Henley people are so helpful and friendly.

At the beginning of this year, Barry and I fulfilled a long-held desire to visit South Africa. After a restless 13 hour flight, we went straight to the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. It was an incredibly moving experience. Mr Nelson Mandela once said '...the values of happiness, justice, human dignity, peace and prosperity have a universal application because each people and every individual is entitled to them'. I came back from South Africa reminded of the lessons of my childhood, "treat everyone as you would have them treat you" inspired by the hope and message of "RESPECT" that I had encountered there. Respect for each other is helping to heal wounds and re-build South Africa into a powerful nation. I hope this year they will have a successful World Cup – at which England do well. Respect is the value that I wish to use as the foundation of my Mayoral year. Respect for the people of this town. Respect for the town itself Respect, of course, is very important between people – we on the council need to remember to respect each other more than we do – we often get carried away by our political beliefs, basically we councillors are on the council in order to serve the people of Henley.

Respect for our town is very, very important, we all aware of this gem we call home, we love our position by the meandering river, nestling in the beautiful Chiltern hills, this is the quintessential, historic market town with beautiful old buildings the veritable jewel in the crown of South Oxfordshire Unfortunately some people do come to our town and show a complete lack of respect by dropping litter on our pavements, Putting domestic waste into public litterbins' allowing their dog to foul our pavements without feeling the need to clear up the mess –ALL of these people show absolute disrespect, in fact no RESPECT at all for our town..

On the council we have learnt to respect the ideas/thoughts and sometimes even wishes of our Youth Council, set up by my husband in 2006 to give the youth of the town a voice we have learnt so much from all our young people.

I even respect my husband - many people will know, especially those who read the Henley Standard – there has been political strife in the Wood household recently! we had our own version of a hung Parliament but we decided a coalition would work better for us.

We must also show RESPECT for each other and in the time of the BIG SNOW in December/January the true spirit of the town blossomed forth, people helped each other – whether with lifts, carrying shopping, digging out – clearing snow – we showed respect and

love for each other and because most of us could only walk and not run or drive about we took that most precious gift – TIME and spoke to each other in passing we became the old caring Henley again.

We have so much to be proud of – including the fourth oldest working Theatre in the UK – the education provided by our schools is second to none – our children have such a great opportunity – a good start to life. I am so grateful our granddaughter Lare will be growing up here. Our churches work together for our common good. There are clubs for all ages / all interests, clubs for every sport – volunteers to teach / coach. We have wonderful cadet forces where young people can be trained in everything from radios to weaponry but always remembering it is all a team game, divided we fall. We look after our older people, our less well-off, less able - for such a small town we have veritable armies of volunteers to drive, to care, to listen, to love, to help whenever anyone is in need. We even have our own Accident and Emergency unit – very well used by the Wood family when Adam and Caroline were growing up.

We are environmentally savvy – our transitional town group is working to find ways we can become even more green –

We also have our cultural side – For instance the Old Fire station Gallery which is available for all our talented people to show their work, the river and rowing Museum, where besides seeing everything the museum has to offer inside, we can gaze upon our great sporting heroes - Pinsent and Redgrave –their statues at least, we have a beautiful open space right in the centre of town which is like a Piazza in fine weather, we have a myriad of Festivals to enjoy - film/fringe,literary, food, music, rewind and of course that most wonderful of spectacles – Henley Royal Regatta, yes, we are even part of the “Season” – or not as we host our very own “Town +Visitors Regatta and the Ladies Regatta whose fame is growing.

We also, of course culturally exchange or “twin” with Leichlingen in Germany , with Falaise in France and Borama in the East, We are also a “Sister City” of Lauderdale-by-the-Sea in Florida. Should you have not yet tried “twinning ” I should urge you to do so , you do not know what fun you have missed.

We have everything here – let us not throw away all that is good by ourselves showing and allowing others to show a lack of RESPECT to our own Henley-on-Thames – the town we all love and of which I am so proud to have become Mayor. I see my role as being an Ambassador for Henley-on-Thames, I already promote the town wherever I go, now I shall have every excuse for doing so.

I shall look forward to visiting and being involved with all of the above-mentioned churches, charities, businesses, schools – I can be available for any event – including christenings, weddings and bar mitzvahs – The Mayoral chain and I will go anywhere we can do some good, please do not hesitate to ask/invite me.

The three Charities I intend to support this year are ‘Sue Ryder, Nettlebed’ – My mother was cared for there, ‘The Chiltern Centre’ – I used to work with autistic children – I know how much respite care is needed to help the families of children who need constant, 24 hour care throughout their lives. ‘Kenton for Keeps’- selfishly , because I love and use the facilities of that beautiful old theatre as do scores of others – Audiences and artistes, young and old alike I feel the Lord has always smiled upon me - whilst I am truly grateful to him, I am also grateful to the people of Henley who voted and chose me to serve on the Council without whose support I should not be standing here now. I am truly conscious of this great honour which has been bestowed upon me today and I would not wish to swap places with anyone else in the world at this moment . People of Henley - I salute you.