

## **Tribute to my Wife Doreen 5.10.1930 – 10.06.2024 at her Funeral on Friday 5 July 2024 in Woking Chapel**

It was Michaelmas Term 1949 when two late teenagers arrived in Oxford to start their studies. One was myself, Derek Tonkin, a grammar school boy and a man of the world now that I had done my National Service. The other was Doreen Rooke, educated at Haberdashers' Aske's Girls School then in Acton, who had won a scholarship to St Hilda's College.

We met quite by chance one Saturday evening, during that first term, at the Cecil Sharp Club commemorating the folk songs and folk dances collected by the celebrated lecturer and composer. There I espied an attractive young lass and daringly invited her to join me in learning the Morpeth Ramp and other folk dances.

The following week I was attending my first classes when I saw the same lass in a German language class. She had not forgotten me.

Doreen caused quite a stir when she softened the heart of the University Reader on Medieval German Dr John Knight Bostock, who was inclined to address his lectures only to the men present as he was not at all convinced that women had any sensible reason to be educated to university level. It was Dr Bostock's habit to have a glass of water on his lectern while he carefully laid out 2 or 3 throat lozenges which he cut in two. That day he had forgotten his penknife, and so he appealed to the young gentlemen present if he could borrow one. But none of them could help. Then Doreen literally rose to the occasion, demurely approached the lectern and proffered to the learned professor her own penknife, because she was after all a Ranger Girl Guide and their motto was: "Be Prepared". Dr Bostock accepted the offer gracefully, and later invited Doreen to tea with his wife.

Doreen was to become his star pupil. She gained First Class Honours in Modern Languages, specialising in Medieval German literature. She also rowed for her college, and indeed for the University in 1951 when Oxford beat

Cambridge by 2¼ lengths, not on the Thames as nowadays, but then on the River Isis at Oxford.

After graduation in 1952 Doreen had a choice of careers. The academic life was not for her, but she was offered a post with GCHQ, the Government Communications HQ at Cheltenham. The Cold War was looming. Doreen pondered on whether to go to Cheltenham, but that would have meant that I rarely saw her, and what might happen to me without her company? So she took a post in London with the Educational Foundation for Visual Aids. In 1953 we married. Doreen knew that my life would take me all over the world, but we were young and adventurous and would not have to face the mortgage problem for a few years yet. We were to find ourselves over the coming years variously in Poland, Cambodia, New Zealand, East Germany, Vietnam, South Africa, Laos and Thailand.

Poland in 1955 was not an easy place to live. Our Embassy found us a flat on the fifth floor of a badly damaged apartment block. We were subject to the attentions of the Polish Intelligence Service. Their archives are now open for public inspection. Reported agent “Piwo”, which is the Polish for “Beer”, on 7 December 1955:

*“They do not have any domestic help, his wife prepares the meals herself and cleans the apartment. It has been seen that on several occasions she goes into town shopping by herself with a basket to buy provisions and she also puts out the rubbish herself. In addition, they go around poorly dressed, with ordinary jackets and shoes, which is really astonishing.”*

I was only 25 and Doreen only 24, recently married. We did not need any domestic help. When going out shopping, Doreen dressed down to look as shabby and inconspicuous as possible so as not to be overcharged as a foreigner in the local market.

Doreen and I were indeed a working team from the moment we arrived in Warsaw to my retirement from the Diplomatic Service in 1990. It was very

much a case of two for the price of one. Yet I have no doubt that when appointing me to successive posts around the world the Foreign Office looked very carefully at Doreen's own character and personality, taking note of her gift for languages, her charm, her modesty, her sense of humour, adaptability, loyalty and rugged determination - invaluable qualities for us both to represent the UK overseas.

We were blessed with four children. Our elder son Christopher, a mechanical engineer, sadly passed away in South Africa in 1983. Our other children are here today: Caroline, a software consultant; Susan, a coastal engineer; and Jeremy, in financial services.

So it was that we returned home on retirement in 1989. Doreen set about renovating our home, took lessons in painting, learnt Italian, ran the accounts of our local Wildlife Park, was an enthusiastic swimmer, and transformed our garden. We travelled all around Europe, into the Baltic States and Russia, as well as to Canada and the United States, and back to South East Asia, delightful years of retirement.

A wonderful, talented, and devoted partner. She brought so much joy and happiness to everyone who met her, and especially to me personally during our 70 years of marriage.

**Derek Tonkin**

5 July 2024