

Memories of Pat

A hot, hot afternoon in Strasbourg in early August thirty something years ago. I was returning from a conference in Germany and then, as now, my preference was to travel by train. We didn't know much about carbon footprints in those days, but I still thought it was the best way to travel. I hadn't seen Pat or James since they had moved from Manchester and must confess I was rather curious to see them in their new and no doubt very stylish apartment near the Orangerie Park.

That afternoon, there was a thunderstorm that would not have disgraced Mount Olympus and rain didn't exactly fall, but moved horizontally at a great speed through the trees on the quiet Strasbourg street outside the Wimberley's apartment. The occasion sticks in my mind, not so much because of the means of travel, or even the dramatic weather, but because Pat, despite being inevitably so weary at the very last stage before becoming a mother for the first time, had taken such immense trouble over my comfort.

Pat's hospitality was, of course, all embracing: not just the wonderful food and drink that was offered, but also the warmest of welcomes and a feeling that the last conversation we had had (perhaps even a whole year before) had now resumed, as though nothing much had happened in the meantime. Pat's deep and genuine concern for those who were privileged to be her friends was quite remarkable. There are, I am sure, many others here in this congregation today who experienced that same unselfish interest and her truly kind spirit.

So, Pat: I remember you with great affection and gratitude. Like me, you made that same journey from Leicester to Oxford; only forty miles by road, but so much further in many ways. You were perceptive, full of good sense and generosity: may you rest in peace.

I'd just like to finish by repeating a short prayer by one of Durham's local saints, the Venerable Bede:

Christ is the morning star: Who, when the night of this world is past, brings to his saints the promise of the light of life; and opens everlasting day.

Thank you.

Martyn Chamberlain

Strasbourg, June 6th 2009