

## Obituary

### Ann Dodgson 1959-2011



PUPILS AT Saffron Walden County High in Essex regularly talk of “the Dodgson effect”. It is, they know, transformational. Successive generations of pupils walked into Ann Dodgson’s French lessons indifferent to her subject and walked out genuine and committed Francophiles.

Ann Dodgson was born in May 1959. She first visited France at the age of 16 and discovered a passion for its language and culture that was to last a lifetime.

She went on to study French and Spanish at the University of Manchester, followed by a PGCE at Homerton College, Cambridge. After taking posts in Cambridge and Essex schools, she moved to Saffron Walden County High in the late 1980s.

Her enthusiasm for all things French was immediately apparent. She would talk about life in France, about the French countryside, French culture. “She seemed genuinely excited by the prospect of speaking French again,” one Year 10 pupil commented about an exchange trip with her.

But Ms Dodgson also knew how to relate to pupils. “The best way to learn French is to get a French boyfriend,” she told girls. Also: “The secret of French conversation is just to say ‘alors euhhhh’.” Ends of term or completed sections of the syllabus were rewarded with trays of home-baked madeleines. And, for A-level classes, there were “naughty days” when she and her students would bring in their pyjamas and sit on the floor, reading children’s books and eating French sweets.

She had a notoriously mischievous streak. When a relentlessly whiny pupil complained of a sore throat while on an exchange trip, Ms Dodgson told him that the French cure involved a needle in the backside. He swiftly recovered. On another occasion, she found an unflattering picture of a colleague and took great delight in pinning it on the staff noticeboard.

But she knew when to tease and when to encourage. In 2002, she became an advanced skills teacher and, in 2006, was appointed professional tutor for trainees, working with the education faculty of the University of Cambridge. She always saw the best in her trainees, helping them to recognise it in themselves, too. And she took personal pleasure in organising a cream tea to celebrate the end of their student year.

Although her headteacher at Saffron Walden refers to “an exceptionally exceptional teacher”, Ms Dodgson was modest and often self-critical. She taught German as well as French, but was aware that she was unqualified for this. And so she arranged to sit her German A level alongside her students.

In 1987, she had married David Barrs, also a teacher. They shared an active interest in the United Nations Association. And, he says, she taught him not to bite into cheese and then put it back in the fridge. The couple had two children, Joe and Ellie.

Ann Dodgson’s cancer was diagnosed almost two years ago and she was told she had nine months to live. She was still teaching in October 2011 and died on 27 November.

*Adi Bloom*

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