**Incoming Regional Presidents speech**

**Queen Hotel, Chester**

**11/11/23**

I would first of all like to say a big thank you to Susan for all her hard work during her year. I know she has been to all the clubs except one and she has made good contacts with Soroptimist friends over the border into Lancashire. It hasn’t all been plain sailing for Susan but she got on with the job. So once again a big thank you to Susan.

I would also like to welcome all the officers some of whom are the same as last year and some are new in post. I look forward to the year ahead.

It is a privilege to be asked to be regional president. I never expected I would be club president when I first became a soroptimist. I did that 3 times – the first time shared it with Helen and we had a great year and the 2nd and 3rd time was during covid for 2 consecutive years. So that was an interesting time. I can`t quite believe I`m here but thank my club for their encouragement and support.

Well, I was doing well with my plans for my year when I was rudely interrupted by my cancer diagnosis in July. However, from my first contact with my GP (and I got an appointment the first time I called the surgery and with the GP I wanted to see – a female), my feet didn’t really touch the ground. Consultant appointments, specialist nurses, investigations snowballed. I got my diagnosis, referred to the cancer centre and oncologist, talked through the treatment regime – a picc line insertion, 2 rounds of chemo and at the same time, 6 weeks of radiotherapy. And I suddenly had become a member of a club no one wants to be a member of. I know there are many ladies here who have also been members of this particular club.

But, as we do, we get on with it and I cannot fault the treatment I have had, the kindness and care I have been shown by the staff at the cancer centre. I feel truly blessed. The communication between the cancer centre and the colorectal team and specialist nurse at Ysbyty Gwynedd was amazing as I was phoned the day after my treatment ended. I`ve had the district nurse visit and the dietitian phone me. The NHS at its best and I know that is not always the case. Yes, I have been very unwell but I am improving and was determined to be here some of today.

My thoughts for my year are now based on three things. One, my recent experience as a patient, one because what is happening in the world with wars and one I`ve taken from history. Today of course is the 11th day of the 11th month. A very significant day of remembrance yet sadly, wars carry on throughout the world. I`m sure our thoughts and love are with those suffering in Gaza at this time.

As a patient I experienced friendship and care from the hospital staff – all going that extra mile to make things easier, more comfortable, understanding. And the friendship I had from my soroptimist friends and church – Salvation Army friends, my beloved Barry, my niece, who all gave their time to collect me and take me for my treatment and then take me home. I had cards, messages and prayers so I knew people were thinking of me and that made such a difference. Barry did any shopping I needed and when I was particularly unwell, two Salvation Army friends took my two little dogs for a few days holiday to give me a rest. It just left Matthew, my cat, to snuggle up to me.

Friendship is a big part of Soroptimists, reaching out to those in need as we do all over the world and in our own communities. Friendship applies to each other in this region as well. Supporting each other’s charities and clubs even coming together to work on a project.

I would just like clubs to just carry on with their work/projects and perhaps share what you are doing at regional meetings and just see different ways how clubs support each other and those in their communities– Friendship and Care.

Many clubs support projects abroad like in Llandudno we support the Chernobyl children which has changed because of the war in Ukraine. We now provide clothes, shoes for the children, toiletries, feminine products for the women, some medicines like paracetamol and wound dressings. I am hoping Gerrie Bailey the North Wales organiser will come and talk to us at a regional meeting to update us on what is happening and what items may be needed. Friendship and Care across the sea.

My original thought was to dip into history and use a quote from a very inspirational woman called Lady Laura McLaren. When I first read this quote it really “spoke” to me, “moved” me. And it fits perfectly with our work with women’s refuges and domestic violence. Laura McLaren was a suffragist. She had been born into a wealthy family in 1854, she was well educated, made a good marriage, she had 4 children. Her father bought Bodnant and Laura inherited it from her father when he died. She had an interest in womens suffrage from a young age. She made many speeches over the years and she spoke a lot of common sense. She received a CBE for her work during the 1st WW. She was the first Lady Aberconwy.

In 1908, she wrote, “ A nation ruled by men alone is like a bird which tries to fly with one wing bound, it rises, flutters, and falls again to earth. Dare to unbind that wing and have patience til it gains strength, then men and women will rise together and lift humanity to heights before unknown.”

Sadly, we know only too well that although the place of women in society has improved considerably, there is still a lot of work to be done. If anyone has been listening to any of the Covid discussions on the tv and how it was in 10 Downing Street at the time of lockdown, it seems some of the women were not treated well during that time and nor are they in many workplaces even now. The 2023 Nobel Peace Prize was won by Narges Mohammadi, for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all. She was awarded the prize while in prison.

We know through the money that some clubs lend women abroad, how it makes a difference to them and gives them that step up they need. Many repay the money quite quickly. It is astonishing what they do with what seems relatively small loans but it enables them to get started and gives them a freedom or “wings” to fly within their own communities and support their families. What seems very little money to us, is a lot to the women who ask for the loans and my goodness, how hard they work to make use of that money.

I know many clubs do work already with refuges and raise awareness of violence against women which is an area I`d like us to raise money for.

And foodbanks – sadly, with the cost of living and the world as it is, for some food is scarce and I know the foodbank in Conwy which is where the Llandudno Club clothes bank work from, are always very busy.

So any money we raise this year from any things we may do in the region, will go to foodbanks, refuges/domestic abuse services and provisions for women abroad as a result of war such as Ukraine for example. I don`t want to introduce new charities as I feel we all have enough to work on already and just concentrate on those. There may be something that crops up during the year and we can discuss it at the time. Now in order to raise some money, I intend to do something next Spring/Summer when the weather is better and I`m better.

My beloved, does not buy me perfume and flowers only rarely. But he does buy me exciting things like motor bike lessons, glider lessons, a zip wire experience – and I`ve done the one at Bethesda and Ffestiniog. I did pass my CBT and rode a scooter – somewhat briefly because covid came along and my CBT ran out. This year in June, I had a flight in a Spitfire that flew in the 2nd WW. The pilot was a former RAF pilot and had been in the Red Arrows for 10 years. I had a German aircraft flying next to us as well to get a feel of what it might have been like. It was a trip of a lifetime.

However, next year I am going to do a wing walk. I will be strapped to a bi-plane wing and this will be to raise money for the region for the areas I have discussed. Barry is buying me the trip for xmas so any money raised will all go to our charities. I really hope you will sponsor me and get your friends and family to as well.

I want you to know, I am here for you all and I hope you will let me know if I can be of any help to your club or any individual. We are going through a period of change with the possible reorganisation and the joys of getting our heads around that. But we can do that altogether – its just another little challenge to face which is not a problem for soroptimists. Change is sometimes something we do not like and often it is forced upon us. But we will deal with each stage as it comes.

I am really looking forward to working with the officers. And I have some plans for outings which will all be within the CNWW area. I do need some ideas for the Cheshire and Wirral areas though so please email me with suggestions. Thank you for your attention and although it’s a bit soon, please have a happy Christmas.