**MY FAREWELL SPEECH**

There are times in your life when you feel the need to take up a challenge. With my 70th birthday looming, it seemed significant that if I was going to do something out of my comfort zone, this was the time. And oh boy, I am glad that I did.

It has been an enriching year. I have visited all the Clubs (except one – SI Nantwich, sorry) and been to umpteen Charter dinners, all of which have been enjoyable and slightly different. I have been to a number of events – a Garden party, bingo, a pop up charity shop and a bazaar. The new member’s lunch was a great success. Two trips – Chatsworth and the Arboretum – were inspiring days out. I have worked on two initiatives – one as a link with South Lancashire and the other on Microloans. I went to Dublin, which was a tremendous inspiration and a boost to my belief in the organisation.

But what of the future of Soroptimism? It has caused us all sadness that three Clubs have closed, SI Birkenhead, SI Ellesmere Port and SI Denbigh and Ruthin. Aging has been a factor in this and it is something all our clubs are facing. If we don’t get younger members how many other clubs are doomed to this fate? I joined SI Chester 9 years ago when I was still working, but the work place holds many demands and women can no longer retire at 60. No longer do people have jobs or career paths for life and changing jobs creates its own pressures. We are also losing members because of the behaviours of other members – gossip, manipulative and uncouth behaviour, and a general lack of respect have been factors in the loss of stalwart members of our region. Please let’s try to be nice to one another and value our friendships.

Enough negativity. On my travels and through the Barbara Dixon Awards I have witnessed some excellent projects being carried out. Work with care homes, baby units, orange cafes, modern day slavery, cancer care, climate change, gardening, crafts, and many others. The fundraising has been phenomenal. Dublin may have inspired me – but you all inspire me more with your generosity, kindness and integrity.

One of my highlights was the collection of period products as my President’s Appeal where all the Clubs traipsed their products to and from this hotel. We gathered together around 750 packets and made a mountain on tables in front of the bar. I sent details and photographs to the King and Queen and I’m pleased to say that a thank you was received – on the slide shown.

I would like to thank all the Officers – can’t name them all – but will just single out Pat with whom I have worked closest and who has kept me on the straight and narrow. But all the Officers have been a supportive and steadfast team. Thank you to SI Chester who have been so encouraging, loyal and patient and especially Wendy who has joined me at all the Charter dinners and other events as well as carrying a load of clobber to and from the car! Thank you to all the members who regularly attend Region meetings and I hope you have enjoyed today.

It is with mixed feelings that I hand over to Janet – I am sure I will feel bereft of the role, but I will be glad to give some time back to my own neglected Club, friends and family. I hope that Janet is able to get her strength back and make the most of her year and take pleasure in the role. I have had a ball and enjoyed it from start to finish. I am indebted to all our members for putting your trust in me to take on this prestigious role - it has been a true privilege and honour which I will never forget.

Adieu.