

Christine Fulton

It is with great sadness I am writing about our late sister Christine Fulton, a former SISEE Regional President and member of SI Maidstone. Christine had been ill for a while and was being cared for in a nursing home near Hitchin, where she died.

Christine was born and raised in Hitchin, Bedfordshire, where she and her friend Gillian Rands were educated together, from nursery school through to Hitchin Grammar where Christine became Head Girl. After graduating from Exeter University, Christine became a Geography teacher and developed a lifelong passion for places and travel.



Following several teaching roles in various locations, Christine was selected as the new Deputy Headteacher at Aylesford Secondary School and moved to Kent. Gillian Rands and her family were already living in the area, so Christine stayed with them until she found a place of her own. Christine was a very successful Deputy Head and stayed at Aylesford until her retirement.

Gillian Rands was already a member of SI Maidstone and it was natural that she should introduce Christine to the club. Christine was an ideal Soroptimist – sociable, caring, practical and interested in the wider world. She held various roles during her time with the club: Secretary, Programme Action Officer, President in 1988-89, and again in 1999-2000. It was while she was Club Secretary that Christine started the tradition of producing a regular newsletter for the club.

Christine was very engaged with SI beyond the club, attending SIGBI Conferences and International Conventions. In 1991 she became South East Regional President. A few years later, it was Christine who first introduced me to Regional meetings – when they were held at 63 Bayswater Road. As a club member, President and Regional President, Christine encouraged and energised other women as they joined SI Maidstone. Her natural ability as a communicator and mentor made her both a dedicated teacher and a committed Soroptimist.

Nellie Adjaye MBE says *“She was the single person who most supported and guided me through my first few years as a Soroptimist in Maidstone. I was enormously grateful to her for the mentoring she gave me in my first Presidency in the Maidstone club, not to talk of the practical help when I was working full time with on call commitments.”*

Janet Garnons-Williams followed Christine as Regional President. She recalls: *“We travelled to lots of events together including a trip to Belgium to scope one of the last Henshaw weekends. I will never forget the Belgian police directing us to the hotel we could see but couldn't get to off the very challenging ring road! I think those who attended the event would agree that the effort was worth it. When the change of insignia was looming and I was stressing about my outfit, it was Christine who pulled me into Dickens and Jones and said firmly that we weren't leaving until I had something to wear.”*

Lesley Rich followed Christine into the role of Club President in 2000: *“As the IPP Christine was very supportive of me and helped me learn how to be an effective President. We travelled together to Durban for the SIGBI conference in 2001 and then shared a tour of South Africa and Victoria Falls afterwards. Despite being two very independent women used to living alone, we shared rooms for 2 weeks and didn't fall out once!”*



Christine at SIGBI
Conference in
Durban 2001

Sue Hunt was introduced to the club by Christine who was her next-door neighbour from 1998-2008. She encouraged Sue to join the Executive Committee, then to become President and later Secretary of the club. Sue and I both joined Christine as Stewards at the Nottingham Conference when Janet Garnons-Williams was SIGBI President in 2005. Christine's organisation skills and ability as both a leader and a team player kept the stewards on track and covering all bases to support President Janet.

For many years, Christine enjoyed regular holidays on the Greek island of Symi and used to meet up with other regulars whom she had befriended. She also introduced several of her friends to this delightful island and she said it was one place she could truly relax. When she retired, Christine bought a small camper van and travelled widely, meeting people, and seeing places she had always wanted to go. She travelled to the Soroptimist International Convention in Helsinki in her camper van and met with other SI members on the way and had many amusing tales about things which happened to her *en route*.

In 2008, Christine moved back to Bedfordshire to be near her sister Martha. She joined SI Bedford but always missed her friends in SI Maidstone and SISEE Region. Christine remained a friend of the club and returned to join our celebrations - the last time being when we celebrated the Region's and Maidstone's 60th Anniversaries in 2019.



Members and former members of SI Maidstone at our Diamond Anniversary lunch. Christine Fulton is in Green, front left of photo.



Christine was a diligent and committed Soroptimist and always willing to initiate and engage with projects and events. She was also sociable and fun-loving, with a great sense of humour and a wicked laugh. She made a great impression on Nellie Adjaye's son Niiashie when he was about 10 years old. Now 34 he recalls her as the "*Jolly, Warm and Kind, well-spoken friend who lived in the cottage*". I think she would have liked that.

Christine Fulton embodied the vibrant spirit of our organisation and will be much missed.

Lesley Rich, SI Medway & Maidstone, October 2020