FEDERATION PRESIDENT JOHANNA RAFFAN M.B.E.

Last Tuesday, 15 June 2021, we heard the sad news that our Federation President

Johanna Raffan died in hospital following a severe stroke some three weeks previously.

We cannot start our Centennial Celebrations without pausing to think of her contribution to our organisation, and to her as a caring and forward thinking woman.

Johanna (who came from Norwegian descant - hence the soft J in the pronunciation of her name ) had been a Soroptimist since 1987 joining first SI High Wycombe and District and later transferring to the SI Thames Valley club. She was active in both her clubs and the Region of London Chiltern where she was Federation Councillor for four years before

becoming a member of SIGBI Board from 2016-2018 as a Director without Portfolio.

Johanna was a Trustee of the Kori Project in Sierra Leone and did much to encourage and support the needs of this charity. She was Chair of the 2015 SIGBI Conference and was to have been at the SI Convention in Dublin in 2023 as their Convention Chairman.

For over 45 years she worked in education, not just in the UK, but travelling across the world giving her the opportunity to see Soroptimists at work globally. She had nurtured ways of working with gifted and talented children and formed the first “National Association for Able Children in Education” which supported teachers and children worldwide. In 2015 Johanna was awarded the M.B.E. for her services to gifted children. She was deeply

spiritual and was the first female Benedictine Oblate in the Church of England. This strong faith must have helped her through difficult times as well as being a comfort to her family members in her last days. Maybe this faith also influenced her choice of her strap line “Believe to Achieve’ and it certainly contributed to her serene sense of presence.

President Johanna has faced many challenges herself in the past 16 months with the

onset of the Pandemic and all the radical changes that it bought to our lives. She should have been formally installed as SIGBI President at the Belfast Conference last October but this was all changed into a virtual session that many of us watched at home. She was planning for our coming Conference in Llandudno to be also virtually accessible - but with an element of disappointment that she was to be denied her promised lively Centennial Party as one of Johanna’s relaxing past-times was the enjoyment of fine wines, good food and good company. She met regularly with her group of Regional and National

Association Presidents and we learnt something of her plans for the future of SIGBI.

She was a very good listener and used our group as a sounding board for many questions where feedback was important to her before progressing her ideas to Board members and others. She was always so calm, considerate and approachable. Many members will feel the loss of a strong and dedicated leader who left us too soon. Let us take a minute to reflect on her life with us ……