

Margaret Cook

Margaret joined Soroptimist International of Ilkley in 1991. Two friends had been encouraging her to join for some time. Margaret had heard about the action to change lives, and felt that through this organisation she could make a difference to lives- especially those of women and girls. The international nature of Soroptimism, and its status within the United Nations provided opportunity to channel her passion for making a difference.

Margaret felt that women had a raw deal in life all over the world, and she joined the union to fight for equal pay when she was first employed at 17! They did get it too although it took time!

She became a local preacher in the Methodist Church at a young age, and continually queried why there were so few women on committees, and why women could not be ordained as ministers- that took a lot longer!

She was a registered nurse by profession, and questioned decisions which deepened inequalities and which compromised care!

She was active in the women's organisations in the Methodist Church and got involved locally in establishing a Family Planning Clinic - they had to travel a long way to the nearest one and then most people did not have a car!

She worked in the community- in Scout and Guide Parent Associations, Parent Teacher Associations, was a founder member of Ilkley Good Neighbour Scheme, as a Governor of the local Primary school for 19 years (having been chair of committees and Chair of the Governing Body for 5 years), and now a member of Ilkley and District U3A doing various jobs within that!

She held posts within the wider Methodist Church- the highlight was travelling to Kenya for an international assembly of women, and then to the International Methodist Conference. This was life changing in 1986! Seeing the needs of the people in Kenya and what we had here in the UK increased her passion to change the inequalities that existed. She could see that people working together could actually change others' lives. She visited a school for disabled children in Mombasa that she, and other young wives of the church, had helped to raise money for. Up to that time those children were hidden away and certainly were not educated. To see what had been achieved was 'mind blowing'.

Soroptimism came along and she made a life changing decision to join! She soon got involved in local projects, was encouraged to attend the Region Councils and the annual Conference. What opportunities were opening before her! Not only was there opportunity to make a difference to other women, but being a member was making a difference to her! She was encouraged to take office in the club- moving on to Region, UKPAC, Federation and then internationally. She is amazed what she was able to achieve along with others. She is still involved locally and at Region, as she feels that within Soroptimism there is the opportunity to influence change.

The highlights of her time as a Soroptimist are too many to mention, but being presented with Honorary Membership of the Federation at the Brighton Conference in 2011 was the biggest surprise that she ever had - such a privilege and very humbling.



In 2012 she was the proud bearer of one of the Olympic torches as it came through Ilkley. SI Ilkley put her name forward and she was thrilled, after interviews and waiting some time, to be told that she would be carrying the torch - but she had to keep quiet about it for a long time, which was difficult! What a day that was with crowds filling Ilkley, the sun shining and family and friends cheering her on!

She has met many people around the world and knows there is so much to do in all places to make a difference in their lives. She has gained much from meeting them, hearing their experiences and sharing stories. She has been given multiple riches from these experiences which has made a difference to herself.