

Ridgway Scholarship.....

It is probably fair to say that the first Ridgway Scholarship place was not as widely advertised as it is today. It was a time before internet, and even Harlaxton Manor was not at all well-known in the Lincolnshire area. It was providential that I spotted the advert in the local paper, fortuitous that I was selected for interview, and fortunate – when I was eventually offered the place – that it was possible for me to drop everything and go!

At that time UE did some graduate degrees, and – having completed my BA already – I calculated that I could manage to get an MA during my year if I worked really hard. I did! Balancing a 4.0 GPA, life in a new country, a range of new subjects and the chance to explore a bit during the regular school year was a tall order, but from the moment I opened the offer letter I was aware that this was a chance in a lifetime, and needed all the focus and energy I could muster, to be worthy of that chance. Times have changed, and Ridgway Scholars now go to UE before their first degree: I think I personally would have found that even more of a challenge, but probably equally rewarding!

The chance to study a range of subjects from some extremely talented faculty was a huge treat... I capitalised on the University's great strengths in literature, creative writing, linguistics, philosophy, education, history of art and studio art, during my time there. My one regret was that I discovered an interest in ceramics several years after my return to England, rather than doing so in time to study with the legendary Les Miley whilst I was at UE. But he taught me art history, and we are still in touch. I'm still in touch with Mike Carson, another UE legend, and a Harlaxton one, as Mike (with wife Maggie and his family) did a remarkable five teaching stints at Harlaxton.

I was looked after really well by so many people – faculty, administration, trustees, which made a big difference in an age before skype and email. I didn't see my family for a calendar year, and we phoned only occasionally: communication was by letter!

The immediate benefits - new subjects, new perspectives, new experiences, a new confidence as I was called on to speak in public on various occasions to student and adult groups – all had a big impact.

There was a new language, too: parking lots, candy, jello.... Me trying not to laugh when American students talked about going out in 'vest and pants' (= waistcoat and trousers), American friends not laughing when I talked about leaving my 'jumper' at a restaurant (sweater in English, but dress in American).

Travel during the year, to a number of other Universities when I was allowed to tag along on Admissions Office visits, to schools in the city, and to a rather dodgy part of Atlanta on Spring Break, was good. Travel *after* the degree course finished was fantastic: on a budget and not liking Greyhound buses, I bought month-long passes on Amtrak, and in 10,500 miles

of travel, saw about 20 states, from California and Oregon, to Florida and Rhode Island. The visit to Bill Ridgway and Mel Peterson, then living in Sonoma, California, was the highlight.

If the immediate benefits were obvious, then assorted longer-term impacts of that first Ridgway Scholarship year have been part of a much longer 'reveal'. Over more than 33 years, I can honestly say that this really did change my life. Firstly, it precipitated the offer of some teaching work at Harlaxton, alongside Library work, cataloguing, audio-visual logistics and summer conference work. Bless those bright and very patient students, John Poff, Elizabeth Hobbs and Beth Horn, amongst my first ever Art History survey class at Harlaxton in spring 1984, as I pedalled hard in the first few weeks to keep a few pages ahead of them, and frequently failed!

But my time at UE and Harlaxton opened doors for me, preparing me to work with international students and with university teachers (which has been my career for almost all of those 33 years since), and, for some 15 years, giving part-time adult education teaching opportunities in Belfast and at Cambridge. Knowledge of the American education system helped enormously in the early years of my current post, and knowledge of American 'geography' still helps me to bridge gaps with newly arriving students each summer. Because of my professional associations and links with the US, I have a network of friends and colleagues there, literally, from 'shore to shining shore'.

If the Scholarship made a difference professionally, it is the friendships that have had the greatest personal impact. I was 'adopted', initially for just one week, as I arrived in Evansville in September 1982. That 'adoption' continues, 33 years later, and Suzy Lantz (then Admissions Director at UE for Harlaxton) has been a 'surrogate mother' ever since. I am part of her family, yet still continue a professional relationship, as the wheel has turned, and on two occasions now, she has led a group of adult students from the USA to participate in the International Summer Programmes I run for the University of Cambridge.

Being back at Harlaxton this last week to share in the unveiling of their copy of Magna Carta brought back cherished memories: of visiting during the lead up to my departure, of living, teaching and working there. It has been marvellous to re-establish contact through the Alumni meetings, to re-visit UE, and to see, first hand, the flourishing embodiment, at both UE and Harlaxton, of the vision of a quiet, brilliant and generous man. Both establishments – thankfully - continue to have many amazing supporters, but the unselfish act of Dr William Ridgway has made 'a magnificent difference' to UE. His gift of the Manor has enabled generations of hundreds of American students to have their own unforgettable semester or year-long experiences. The club of Ridgway Scholars is a far smaller one, but - I could argue – even luckier. The ranks grow by just one a year, but I suspect we have all taken away a lifetime's worth of new opportunities as a result. It's a big responsibility to live up to the donor's vision and standards (so no pressure, newest recruit!), but a huge privilege.

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