

Talking Heads (Thursday 20th Nov'20) - Agnes Xavier- Phillips JP DL
LLB(Hons) Accredited Mediator, SCM SRN



Senior Warden Dr. Kathy Seddon, introduced another excellent "Talking Heads" session with the Chair of our Public Relations Committee (PRC) Agnes Xavier- Phillips in conversation with Court Assistant Henry Gilbert Esq, former High Sheriff of W.Glamorgan and Secretary/Deputy Chair of PRC. Henry stated at the outset that they would not be 'solving world issues!' but would enjoy a dialogue exploring the life of Agnes. Henry asked about the origin of Agnes' double barrel surname. She explained that Xavier was her maiden name and Phillips her married name which she changed to Xavier-Phillips in memory of her father, a big influence in her life. The hyphen was added to avoid her name being abbreviated to just Phillips ! Agnes was amused at Henry's suggestion that he believed she lived in Caerphilly Castle and known as Lady Agnes . *"Alas, I don't live in a castle but my house is in the castle grounds and I can safely say Caerphilly Castle, the biggest castle in Wales and the moat is in my back garden - please feel free to award me a title though!"* As for her origins, she describes herself as a British Malaysian Indian - 40 years in Britain, born and bred in Malaysia and Indian ethnic origin.

Agnes' legal career followed next. She is a qualified Solicitor and has been a Senior Executive, General Counsel and Board Advisor. She read law at Cardiff University and did her Law Society finals at Guildford College of Law. Agnes completed her training contract with Geldards Solicitors, Cardiff and was retained as an Assistant Litigation Solicitor. She left private practice when she accepted an in house role as Senior Litigation Counsel within Nat West and later promoted to Manager of their Litigation department.

Following a merger, the business was acquired by Abbey National and she moved to London to manage the acquired portfolio, provide training and was subsequently promoted to Head of Specialist Litigation. Through another merger, the business was acquired by GE Capital. She successfully managed her first project of outsourcing the in house legal services. She was promoted to Head of Legal and became Client Relationship Manager, managing the panel law firms. She was also responsible for introducing and embedding GE Women's Network (GEWN) into the acquired business and subsequently became Regional GWEN Hub Leader. She represented her business at the Council of Mortgage Lenders and was Founder Chairperson of the Finance & Leasing Litigation Forum. Agnes reached the peak of her legal career when she was promoted to General Counsel of GE Capital.

Henry asked Agnes about the highlights of her legal career. She said there were many but one of significance is when she represented the Financial Services Industry on the Access to Justice Working Party on the Woolf Reforms. The review looked at the costs, accessibility and delay in the civil justice system. The resulting reforms were the most radical in 30 years and provided the landscape for the civil justice system for the 21st C. The other highlight was when she received the GE CEO Award presented to just 25 international GE employees for outstanding performance. This was an all expense paid 2 week cruise on a privately chartered cruise ship for both her and her husband. The award itself was presented in an open air 'Oscar' type ceremony with the Mediterranean Sea as a backdrop!

Henry spotted a gap in the 'story' of about eight years. Agnes returned to her time when she was still in Malaysia and explained her first job was in Education as a Supply Teacher providing maternity cover. As always Agnes proved to be a great success and turned down a proposal to pursue a teaching career and wanted to travel to London. She took up nursing which appeared a secure way of setting down roots in London as a young adult abroad. Training involved theoretical study in the School of Nursing and practical training on the hospital wards. It was physically daunting, a challenge that Agnes rose to. She stayed the course and after three years qualified as a State Registered Nurse. She then undertook post qualification study of Midwifery and qualified as a State Certified Midwife. Within 8 years of qualifying, Agnes advanced from Staff Nurse to Ward Sister, Tutor at the School of Nursing, Examiner for the practical nursing exams and promoted to Nursing Officer. Having reached the pinnacle of nursing- a meteoric rise, she turned it down to pursue her lifelong ambition to be a lawyer.

Henry asked about her nursing highlights and Agnes felt honoured working with Sir Magdi Yacoub, the famous pioneering cardiothoracic surgeon who performed delicate heart valve replacement surgery with amazing flexibility and dexterity. During cardiothoracic surgeries, she saw the use of heart-lung machines and once witnessed open heart massage performed during car-

diac arrest. One of many highlights of her midwifery training was witnessing the birth of quadruplets.

Henry then asked about her present third career. Agnes described it as a diverse 'portfolio career'. It includes being a Vice President member of Cardiff Business Club and Council and Committees Member of Cardiff University and recently recorded a Message of Support for the Graduating Class of 2020-
"you are what you are because of the choices you make, make good choices and be the best in whatever you do." Agnes is also a Magistrate and was interviewed by the BBC on her role which was televised. She is a Member of Welsh Water and found the 'not for profit' ethos refreshing. She was very honoured when appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Gwent and recently appointed Director of Ffin Dance upon introduction by their patron.

Henry moved on to her Livery Company role, "Why the Welsh Livery Company?" Agnes explained her membership of the London Liveries, namely the City of London Solicitors and Arbitrators Livery as she is also an Accredited Mediator. She had to become a Freeman of the City of London prior to joining the Liveries. She was introduced to the Welsh Livery at a retired Solicitors lunch at the Cardiff & County Club. She was impressed by its aim of nurturing young Welsh talent through their Awards programme. Agnes is also a Court Assistant, Member of the Awards and GPC Committees and has led the re-vamp of the website, introduced a bilingual site and championed greater use of social media to promote the Livery.

Henry asked two further questions, "what do you miss in the current COVID situation and do you have any regrets?" Agnes replied "I miss social engagements and have "no regrets" but I wish my parents were still alive to share my journey." Henry responded that they would have been very proud of her.

Agnes thanked Henry, Liverymen and all guests (local and abroad) from all her areas of involvement.

The Master thanked Agnes and Henry for an excellent discussion and asked us all to charge our glasses and make a toast to "Liverymen and friends everywhere"

**Article by Dr. Kathy Seddon PhD
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