

## 40 Years of Friendship by Catherine Forsyth 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Ann and I met in Geneva in 1980. Our husbands were close friends and to our relief we discovered we enjoyed each other too. She was working at Princeton at the time, her husband Rick at the University of Geneva. We always got together when she was back in Switzerland. At the birth of our son, my husband and I agreed, Ann and Rick were our obvious choice for godparents.

Her move to Oxford in 1982 meant we saw each other more often. Over the years we both ended up divorcing our respective husbands and met up on our own, in Oxford or Geneva. In 2006 she announced that with what she had inherited from her father she intended to buy a house in France not too far from Geneva. We set off on a scouting mission, first in Burgundy, then along the railway line west of Lyon. We found an estate agent in Roanne and took a tour of the properties for sale. By pure luck, a house came on the market the very day we were on our search. It was love at first sight for a house in the Mediaeval Bourg of Villerest, right outside Roanne. Ann told the agent on the spot that she'd take it.

At the time Ann's French was 'rusty' so I often served as intermediary for discussions or documents concerning the workings of French bureaucracy. We had fun finding furniture for the new house and exploring the region, especially the many excellent restaurants there. I am still not sure of the exact number of meals we had at Roanne's Michelin three-star Troisgros, but we got to know it quite well! More than once we went back to the kitchen to speak with the Japanese woman who was the pastry expert, Ann of course in Japanese.

In 2010, after having retired from her job at Oxford, Ann decided to go back to Japan for another visit. She reminded me I'd once said I was keen to go see the country she knew and loved, so she proposed a two-week trip with her to her favourite spots. I jumped at the chance! Only later did it occur to me that we'd never spent 24/7 together, especially sharing the same hotel room, and I briefly wondered if it would put a strain on our friendship. But it was surprisingly harmonious, just simple and fun. She made up for any translating I had done for her over the years and handled absolutely everything there, introducing me to her many friends and colleagues and to what she thought I should see.

What struck me most in all our encounters with people from Ann's life in Japan was how much they seemed to want to 'repay' her somehow for what she had offered them in the past. The day after our arrival in Tokyo a former colleague of Ann's took us for lunch at a restaurant called De Roanne, where the chef had spent time training at Troisgros. Three of Ann's former students took us to

dinner at an all-tofu restaurant to thank her for her mentoring over the years. An old friend, who decades earlier had accosted Ann at a bus-stop in Tokyo to ask for a chance to practice her English, took us to a professional kimono maker where we tried on several of his masterpieces, then to see the great Kamakura Buddha, followed by a dinner by the sea. For Ann's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday we celebrated with a lunch at her favourite sushi restaurant, where she gave the name of every sort of fish we were tasting – with gusto! Then it was on to yet another invitation to dinner with former colleagues.

The rest of the trip was tourism, visiting various sites in Japan, with a stop in Takayama where we stayed in a ryokan and had lunch in an all-eel restaurant (after warning Ann it was only eel, the owners were delighted with her Japanese and her culinary audacity!). A night in Kanazawa offered another gastronomic miracle meal. Kyoto was a must with its magnificent gardens and temples and a day-trip to Nara before returning to Tokyo by bullet train. Basically, within two short weeks we had been invited out by Ann's many long-standing friends and cherished colleagues and had viewed a rich assortment of tourist sights. It was my unique good fortune to be able to share with Ann what turned out to be her last trip to Japan.

It seems the aim of our frequent visits over the years was to celebrate as many occasions together as we possibly could. We saw each other in France practically every Easter to open up the Villerest house and, to mark our American roots, at Thanksgiving to close it for the winter and often the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. We sometimes managed a Christmas or a New Year or occasional birthday together in Oxford or Geneva. We made a point of exploring the world of gastronomic excellence wherever we were - in Japan, in France or Geneva or New York.

Everyone who knew Ann will agree, she was not gushy. But she was considerate and generous in a quiet way. She always brought me my favourite tea from Oxford on every visit to Villerest. In Japan she bought fabric, then announced she was going to make two purses for me with it, which I now use for dressy occasions. She also had a wonderfully wry sense of humour. Soon after we met I had a serious accident with multiple broken bones. As a gesture of sympathy she gave me a t-shirt marked 'I may not be perfect, but parts of me are excellent.' I howled with laughter. She admitted she'd wondered if she'd gone too far, but my reaction confirmed she'd struck just the right note. I once told her that when visiting Villerest I slept so well that I suspected being bitten by a tse-tse fly in her house. On the following visit, she told me before going to bed that I'd find a jar on the kitchen counter to take up to my room – in it I'd find a tse-tse fly.

Each of us will miss different things with Ann gone. For me, I'll feel the absence of being able to rely on her rational, practical, unsentimental response to every

challenge, but also of her loyalty and thoughtfulness, of our discussions on innumerable subjects: the world situation, culinary experiences, the men in our lives, the wonderful salt-of-the earth next-door neighbours in Villerest, books (including the ones she – and her mother - wrote), films, work preoccupations, our families. I have three sisters with whom I am very close and who all knew Ann. Over the years she reached the stature of a fourth sister for me.