

In Memoriam: Pauline Perella (1982-2003)

Pauline had been working for the Open University (OU) part-time when she started teaching part-time in the maths department at RGS. That was in 1982; she became full-time a couple of years later.

She soon proved herself an able and dutiful teacher, popular with boys and staff alike, fully robust enough to cope in the then prevailing male atmosphere. Equally and imperceptibly she soon became a mother figure to us all.

Gifted with unlimited patience, she was constantly in demand by pupils. One of her specialities was worksheets, personally prepared to address some point. They appeared as a collage of photocopied questions, orientated in all ways to cover the page. I found one once under the glass in the photocopying room. "How did you know it was mine?" she asked (since her handwriting did not figure). "When I picked it up, I could not tell which way round it was!" I replied. Humour was very much part of our camaraderie, though I sometimes thought she was unsure of when I was joking!

Pauline impressed too by her breadth of outlook. As still an OU employee she was entitled to do their courses, and frequently would talk of her essays into history and other humanities, geology and sciences.

Bridge and chess figured too. Along with Dr Geoff Swinden (1969 -1998), she ran the bridge club every Friday night after school; her husband, Malcolm, helped regularly too - under her leadership RGS was represented at competitions around the country. (When she first joined RGS she stepped in to run the chess club too to stop it from folding.) She thoroughly enjoyed the drama productions and music concerts.

She was immensely hard-working, always unflappable and never seemed to lack time to cope. In all her time at RGS she only took half a day off sick!

Pauline carried a major responsibility for a number of years: the organisation of the 11+ entry examination. Her challenge was to assess the mathematical potential of children at that formative age and to coordinate the pastoral side of the process too. In many ways that meant she exercised the role of the human face of the mathematics' team - a role to which she was instinctively well suited!

The maths' team had an annual get-together at the beginning of each academic year. Pauline soon enthusiastically embraced the role of hostess at her turn and we had many happy gatherings at her house. Indeed, in retrospect, they blur into a mix of social occasions, some of them impromptu, in which the conversation flowed on multiple themes,

and time seemed to stand still. Hospitality, human warmth, empathy and generosity seemed to be hers in the most natural way.

I resigned in 2003 to move to a new portfolio of work, of which the OU (again!) was one new element for me. I was involved in tuition for two courses, for one of which, "MST121", Pauline was a senior figure to me. I came to experience a new aspect of her professionalism when she saw fit to correct my shortcomings in some particular or other. By that time she and Malcolm had become my good friends; that friendship was if anything enhanced by that further experience.

Pauline retired from RGS in 2003, though she continued to work for the OU. She has had a long retirement, though sadly marred in recent years by ill health and disability. She was a great friend, colleague and teacher and has enhanced the learning of so many pupils. Her five children had a wonderful mother and Malcolm a wonderful wife. Our sympathies go to them all.

Peter Mitchell (1980 – 2003)