

ANN DARNBROUGH OBE (1931-2013): MEMORIAL CELEBRATION

CONWAY HALL, 13 FEBRUARY 2014

(with small revisions)

Trevor

We have come together this evening to remember the life of a remarkable woman, Ann Darnbrough, one who has touched the lives of so many of us. I say 'us' advisedly – I didn't know Ann but, since being asked to lead her humanist funeral, I have come to appreciate what a rare person she was.

One consistent theme which has emerged from the tributes received since her death is that she actually changed lives.

Derek, her husband, above all, echoes that sentiment. He tells me that, following a previous unhappy marriage, Ann turned his life around. She raised him up and introduced new horizons; saw him as something of a knight in shining armour, and never deviated from that regard until the very end.

Chris Bazeley, who can't be here, writes:

"[She] made a tremendous difference to many lives, but especially mine, in giving me the chance and confidence to rise above my disability and to actually assist in doing something worthwhile and allowing me to at least partially repay the world for all that it has done for me. Ann's vision created a legacy for all the less fortunate of the world that must stand far higher and broader than just remembrance."

Lydia Karoum writes from America:

"When we meet I will share with you a conversation I had with Ann in our house over thirty years ago concerning my son Haidar. With her great intuition she perceived qualities in him that have proved to be truly prescient. I will never forget this and many other conversations I've had with her. I am so proud to have been within her large circle of friends."

Frank Adams, another who cannot be with us, comments:

"If it is any consolation, I have held Ann in very high esteem, as the one who directed me into the direction for the second half of my life with her thirst for the need for accurate, impartial and timely information. She was also responsible for introducing me to Marlene Pease, producer of *Does He Take Sugar?*: an introduction that became another milestone in my life."

David Yelding, who is here, wrote:

“I know it is usual to say in these circumstances that someone was an original, but in this case it is true – Ann was really unique. [The fact that she was spared] the indignities of the last stages of her illness leaves us free to remember her as she really was – free thinking, questioning – and afraid of nobody, however grand. I will miss her perceptive and (often) acerbic commentary on events, people and (particularly) establishment institutions. Even more than these was her sense of humour – there never was an encounter with Ann, social or professional, in which we didn’t laugh a lot, whatever the subject.

I don’t need to recount to you the great things she achieved except perhaps to say that the way she inspired others will mean her influence will continue, even if its provenance is unacknowledged.”

Derek

This is for me an emotional occasion, not only in remembering Ann, but in having so many old friends here. It is no accident that I have chosen this venue, for Ann and I were married here in December 1975. It betokened our views then, and it does so now.

I must echo David’s comment about Ann not being afraid of anyone. I recall an evening when we were invited to a private view of an art exhibition at Lambeth Palace. It was raining, and as we approached the front door an official stopped us and said: “I wonder if you could hang back a little, while the archbishop goes in.” As a black limousine went by, I stood back deferentially. But Ann simply carried on. I think she said, “I’m having none of that”. Full of trepidation, I followed behind. Only to find, inside, Ann engaged in close conversation with the archbishop, and him saying: “Oh that’s most interesting. You must come again another time”.

Trevor

We can also let Ann speak for herself: through this evening I will be quoting from her last book, *A Rebellious Disposition*, published in 2007. Here is a little something from her ‘personal reflections’, responding to the question “What is the most important lesson life has taught me?”

“It is always worth putting your head above the parapet – the view can be daunting and challenging but also inspiring. Once a rebel, always a rebel.”

Derek

Ann was born in Madrid, where her father was the foreign correspondent for The Times. This, no doubt, explains her skill as a writer. Would you please indulge me if, as it were both to mark her arrival in the world and to celebrate her free spirit, we play a song recorded by one of Spain's greatest singers, Conchita Supervia, in Madrid, which appeared in the year of Ann's birth. The song is evocative of a lot of Ann's free spirit. Trevor will set the scene for us:

Trevor

A young flower seller has carnations from Granada. They have, she says, all the scent, the body and spirit you will find in me. They are cheap, but if you love me I will *give* you one of my carnations and you will see how well we get on when we are alone. If you really love me, I will love you still more, and all the pretty carnations shall be for you.

Supervia: Clavelitos (Valverde)

Trevor

Ann came to England at the age of five, destined to go into hospital suffering from spinal tuberculosis. With us this evening is Meriel Rosewarne, who played with Ann as a child and who would like to say a few words. Was she always rebellious?

Meriel Rosewarne

Derek has asked me to speak briefly about Ann's early life and I hope that my memories of our friendship at that time will provide some background.

Ann and I first met when we were both about eleven years old in the village of Wenvoe, near Cardiff, Ann's mother had died when her little daughter was four years old. Her father, who was an overseas correspondent for a national newspaper, was often abroad for longish periods. During this time Ann stayed and lived with two sisters who shared a house in the village - one a hospital matron and the other a nurse. They cared for Ann very diligently and with considerable kindness. At about this time I met Ann and we soon became close friends. Ann was recovering from spinal tuberculosis and she still needed to wear a supportive leather jacket, but we were nevertheless able to make the most of our freedom to play together and sometimes to walk in the fields and the local woodlands. Initially I often pushed Ann in an old pushchair salvaged from the garden shed, which my father had cleaned up for us. Hopefully this speeded up her recovery! We never admitted to anyone that 'play' involved climbing trees and paddling in streams! The risk to

Ann was quite considerable but the enjoyment was delightful for us both. It was, however, quite difficult to explain why we both occasionally returned with a torn dress or sopping wet shoes!

Ann's determination to take part in these adventures in spite of her disability was a characteristic which she continued to display throughout her life. It is also probable that this early period of disability was the seed corn of her later commitment to help those with permanent disability.

Recently, a mutual friend, Margaret, said to me: "Meriel, what an idyllic childhood we had" and I had to agree!! Ann was part of that childhood.

Trevor

And we do well to remember that, as well as a dedicated campaigner, Ann was a loving mother. Here is her son, **Philip** who will also introduce a piece of music that he recalls Ann appreciated.

Philip Darnbrough: "I'm unique here today in that my mother gave me the gift of life, something that in her case was far from a foregone conclusion and was an early sign of her willpower and determination. My birth was always going to be high risk due to the damage caused by the spinal tuberculosis she suffered as a child, and further births were absolutely ruled out by doctors. I was born a month prematurely by caesarean section, but I later learnt from my father that during her pregnancy my mother refused to take any pain relief, despite enduring difficulty and pain; she was offered a new drug which was effective in reducing the effects of morning sickness. That drug was thalidomide, which could very well have left me deformed, if I had survived at all. This was an early sign of her concern for others, even at expense of her own comfort.

She had worked before I was born, but devoted herself to motherhood in my formative years, and was always a voracious reader, a passion she passed on to me. Virtually every night she would read aloud to me, bringing children's classics such as 'Treasure Island' and 'Tom Sawyer' to life, but would not complain when I asked her to read very unchallenging things such as the 'Billy Bunter' stories. I definitely started reading at a young age because of her, and often read books intended for older children. In my early years she worked part time in a pharmacy and helped with the administration of the business.

Before and whilst she worked in the charitable field she actively helped others. As a young child I remember regular visits to the east end of London to see Mrs Alp an elderly widow who she befriended. After Mrs Alp died she got to know Mrs Simpson, an old lady confined to her flat, close to where we lived in Barkingside. I often joined her on these supportive visits. There were others, most notably Trixie Joule, who was blind and mostly paralysed, although always mentally active.

Trixie had been a dancing instructor before blindness and other health problems started in her early twenties. MS was thought to be cause of some of the ailments. My mother worked hard to give Trixie experiences outside her care home, with visits to our house, holidays, trips to restaurants and opportunities for Trixie to engage with creatures such as donkeys that she could stroke with her one functioning hand.

As I got a bit older, my mother was keen to find interesting and fulfilling work and got a job at the Joan Pound Organisation This was a public relations company which did some work on behalf of charities. From there my mother moved fully in to the charity world by working at the headquarters of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. I joined her at some meetings and house visits, and helped at the MS society as a summer job.

My mother had a very difficult start in life and her marriage to my father ended in divorce, but she had a long and positive life. I remember her saying that she did not expect to live much beyond 40, due to physical problems caused by spinal tuberculosis and in particular the fact that she had only one kidney. We can all take comfort from the fact that against the odds she did have a long and full life. I know that her marriage to my stepfather Derek, resulted in a perfect and loving partnership.

Whether travelling, writing together, socialising or running the National Information Forum, which she started from scratch, this was a natural progression from the writing she had done with Derek, with publications such as 'Directory for Disabled People'.

Further examples of the happy and joyful side of her life are I think best described in her own words, from her book 'A Rebellious Disposition'. To the question "what did you most appreciate in life?", she said: "Fun and meeting friends old and new, the enormous pleasure of reading, the wonders of nature". As to what she most appreciated in life, my mother said: "My partner, life, sunshine, nature, birds singing, and the freedom of being a secularist".

Ann was a good, caring and inspirational mother with great *joie de vivre*; she lived a full life and achieved a lot, overcoming obstacles that would have been too much for many people. She had a great love of all living creatures, and was very fond of her cats, typically her last cat Tom and his predecessors were originally strays, rescued by a lady called Jessie whom she had befriended.

When I was a child our much loved dog Bunty was from Battersea Dogs Home. She loved everything to do with the natural world, and enjoyed adventurous trips to places like India and Zimbabwe with Derek, pushing herself to the limits of her physical ability. She also spent time in Sudan on a rather gruelling trip working for Voluntary Services Overseas. In my twenties I toured

East Coast of USA with her and Derek, and this is how I would like to remember her, at the height of her powers with years of achievement to come.

In terms of musical taste my mother never really collected or followed any type of music, once openly admitting in a speech that she could rarely remember the names of any tunes, although one she did like and remembered was 'The Stripper'. She certainly liked jolly tunes & songs, and something that would get a party started.

As a child she did quite enjoy Frank Sinatra, and in more recent years I was a little surprised to find she had developed a liking for Barry White. However, a constant favourite of hers throughout my childhood was Herb Alpert & The Tijuana Brass, thus our next musical selection will be 'Spanish Flea'."

Derek

Philip's account of our meeting was not strictly correct. Ann and I first met at a charity event, something that was entirely co-incidental. As Assistant General Secretary of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, she was organising the presentation of a promotional film. I was attending as the representative of a branch of the Society – the Waltham Forest branch - where Ann had previously been a volunteer. Ann later admitted that she chose to sit next to me. And when the show was over I played my part by defending her against a pretty hostile audience reaction. Our first date came several weeks later. I asked a friend – the chair of the branch - if he would keep an eye on the children – Cathy and Philip – and he willingly said "yes, of course". And I had my first romantic encounter with Ann. When I returned, my friend said "would you mind telling me who you were meeting?" I told him – Ann Darnbrough – whereupon his face went grey, ashen, and he struggled to control his emotions. It turned out that he knew Ann, and for years had fancied her like mad.

I remembered our first encounter and took a punt by inviting her to a lecture on the violinist Jascha Heifetz. I soon discovered that classical music was not on her agenda, but at the time she accepted with alacrity. If we could be said to have a musical remembrance this is it:

Heifetz plays Drigo's 'Valse bluette'.

There was always between us a lack of compatibility over music and sport. And whereas I tended to be fearful, Ann was always fearless. She introduced me to new ways of thinking: out with the nylon socks and conventional wisdom. I recall, in particular, that early on, visiting a friend's cottage, she drew my attention to an old fireplace. The wooden surround was knurled and

pitted. She admired its imperfection; in sharp contrast to smooth, modern products. I learned that an opposition to perfection was her watchword: for example, that in welfare provision there would always be some cheats who 'played the system', but that one had to accept some irregularities to ensure the greater good. She believed in legislation, not because it allowed you to punish people, but because it could point the way. For our honeymoon, she took me abroad – for the first time – and, despite her unbelief, extolled the beauties of Chartres Cathedral. She loved me passionately, and I learned many things quickly. We soon became, and remained, boon companions. We compensated for each other's deficiencies. Importantly, our views on politics and religion coincided. One other thing, as well as sex, that brought us together was a shared passion for the written word. One of Ann's initiatives at the MS Society was to bring out a monthly information sheet. She believed passionately – and she was passionate about most things – that people with MS needed more than tea and sympathy; that there were vast opportunities that could improve their lives. After two years, taking a different subject each month, the collection had become a valuable resource and attracted the attention of a publisher, Martin Woodhead, who thought that there was a book in it. Ann came home with the suggestion but was diffident. "Let's do it together," I said. But Martin is here. Let me ask him to take up the story:

Martin Woodhead: "Here with some of the books. 'Passion' was the first note I made. I think that Ann was the most passionate author I had the pleasure of dealing with in my first company, which was called Woodhead Faulkner. She was passionate, she was energetic, brimming with ideas. It was a huge pleasure to have known her and worked with her for about 14 years from 1975, when we first met, to 1989, when the company was sold to an American publisher [Prentice Hall]. When I heard that Ann had died I was flabbergasted to see how old she was, because I had always thought we were about the same age. Having just turned 65 I was more than a decade out. She had that youthfulness which was so powerful. I'm unsure where we first met, or what kicked off this amazing book, *Directory for Disabled People*. We published the first six editions of it, and I was delighted to discover in the list of books with which Ann and Derek have been involved since 1989 that it went on to eight editions all told, a really remarkable feat. The Minister for the Disabled, Alf Morris, who kindly wrote the foreword back in 1977, when it was first published, said that "the authors, in co-operation with the Multiple Sclerosis Society, deserve the warmest thanks for all the hard work that has gone into producing this Directory. For my own part I am delighted to welcome it as a most important work of reference which will be of great service to handicapped people and everyone seeking to improve their welfare and status in contemporary society."

So that, as it were, got the show on the road. How they were able to keep their jobs and produce all these editions, not only of this book but start producing other books as well, really was an astonishing feat. The next one was *Fund Raising and Grant Aid*; that was followed by *Directory of Aids for Disabled and Elderly People*, a fascinating and so comprehensive store of all the different ways that disabled people can live more topical and fulfilling lives. So much of it that is still current too. And then finally, in terms of Woodhead Faulkner's involvement, the *Sex Directory* was published as well, which again was an eye-opener. People then didn't talk about sexual problems to any extent, but this book opened up so many topics that it had been so difficult to find any information about. So it was a wonderful experience for me and my colleagues. We always thought of Ann and Derek as Torvill and Dean, and it seemed to us a perfect partnership which worked so well together. They may not have had the same musical tastes, but certainly in terms of teamwork and producing this amazing information it was quite astonishing. I think they summed it up themselves in the acknowledgments of one of their books when, as well as thanking many other people for their help, they said "finally we must thank each other, for it is quite certain that neither one of us could have written this book alone."

Trevor

In the 80s, while continuing to compile the *Directory for Disabled People*, and chair the emerging National Information Forum, Ann worked as Director of the Disability Unit of AHRTAG (Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group), with responsibility for progressing its work in developing countries. In this role she founded, edited and raised funds for *Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) News*. This commitment also took her to India, where doctors were developing the famous Jaipur foot, a prosthetic replica of the human foot made from discarded motor tyres, so important in a country where people commonly wore sandals. She also visited Bangladesh, where **Val Taylor**, Co-ordinator of the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed in Dacca, vividly remembers the impact of her support:

"Ann remains in my mind as a most compassionate person who was strongly motivated to work for people with disabilities in the poorest countries. Thus it was that, through the charity AHRTAG, she came to Bangladesh to help us set up workshops for the production of mobility aids and wheelchairs. In those days these facilities were generally not available in the country. With the support, both financial and the sharing of expertise that Ann organised, the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) was able to commence the development of production of mobility aids and wheelchairs in Bangladesh. This was a

real breakthrough enabling CRP's patients suffering from spinal cord injury and children with cerebral palsy to become mobile once more. CRP is now celebrating the start of its 35th year of operations in Bangladesh. We - patients, staff members, students and our trustees - celebrate the wonderful input received from Ann for the work of CRP in the 1980s: work that continues to be greatly appreciated to this day."

Glen McGhee, a worker at that centre adds:

"I worked with Ann in the 80s, when she headed the Disability Group of AHRTAG. It was Ann who had great faith in me and gave me the encouragement to go and work with CRP in Bangladesh. She was a great manager and inspired me and others to work there and set up workshops at a time when very few mobility aids were being made in the country. I look back and see these years and my work with AHRTAG and CRP as being the best of years."

We are privileged to have with us Ken Ritchie, who then ran AHRTAG and remembers Ann's phenomenal energy:

Ken Ritchie: "I had the privilege of working with Ann for about five years. If you looked at the organisational diagram I was the boss, but she was the one who told me what to do. AHRTAG was one of those organisations you needed to work with for quite some time to remember what the initials stood for. But it was about promoting primary health care in developing countries. We had a number of senior staff. Ann headed the Disability Unit. I like to think that we were all part of a fairly professionally run show, but, as others have said, Ann was different. She wasn't just professional. It was the passion that came into it too. Ann was the one who was the custodian of the values of the organisation. She was the one who was so hugely driven by the thought of what it means to be in a developing country, if you don't have the support you need to be able to live a proper life in spite of a disability. She was the one who kept us reminded on a daily basis that what we were there for were people, and in her case for people who had disabilities; and we were told daily that first and foremost that they were people. She was the one who gave us that inspiration that kept us going. Of course, as with any organisation, there were from time to time disagreements, but I have never come across anybody who could disagree as nicely as Ann. We didn't disagree that often, but I think that at any time when we actually did Ann was able to respond with that sort of concerned smile, and I don't think there were any occasions when at the end she didn't actually get her way. But I was quite surprised at the extent to which people, people in Bangladesh and others she had worked with remembered her. What she did was to do with her energy. It wasn't that she was in Bangladesh as a technologist, telling them how to put

together wheelchairs. It wasn't as a physiotherapist or a medical person. She was there because she was concerned, and she did indeed make an impact. She was an inspirational person to work with. She was somebody who was good to work with; she was generous in her support for others; she was an amazing person, and it was a privilege to work with her."

Trevor

But although Ann's primary focus was on disability, she was also passionate about animals, supporting a host of animal charities. Part two of *A Rebellious Disposition* is particularly emphatic. Let me quote:

"I have an overwhelming sense that the creatures with whom we share planet earth deserve our utmost respect. That perception is rooted in an understanding that I, with the rest of human kind, share with other animals common attributes of intelligence, sense and emotions. The consequence of such a belief is to deem other species of the natural world worthy of rights and respect as we are worthy of rights and respect...Given that we know that animals share so many human attributes, not least our common sensitivity to suffering, I find it stupefying, and depressing, that so many good people remain indifferent to their welfare. We still kill them for sport, eat them by the billions, incarcerate them in factory farms, dissect them in school classrooms (what a rotten lesson), abuse them for our recreation, and cage and torture them for scientific experiments."

Mike Huskisson of the Animal Cruelty Investigation Group writes:

"Ann was a lovely compassionate lady who kindly supported our work for many years."

I know that he speaks for many other animal charities.

Trevor

Returning to Ann's preoccupation with disabled people – particularly one of keeping them informed – a natural ally was Alf Morris. Both he and Irene, who is with us this evening, remained true supporters and friends. Alf, then Minister for Disabled People, as Martin has told us, wrote the foreword to the first edition of *Directory for Disabled People*. His contribution was upbeat and in striking contrast to the current political approach to disability:

"I feel that both the statutory and voluntary sectors can take some pride in the range of new benefits and services now available to help disabled people to increase their independence and lead fuller lives ...The list is extensive and continually growing."

He welcomed the *Directory* as a great service to everyone seeking to improve the welfare and status of disabled people in contemporary society. Sadly, Alf has passed on, but Lady Morris and his daughter, Gill Morris, are both here to remember the joint endeavours of Alf and Ann.

Gill Morris: “I’m delighted to pay tribute to Ann Darnbrough on behalf of my late father, Lord Alf Morris. He was, as many of you will know, the architect of pioneering legislation designed to add life, to years, to millions of disabled people. The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act changed the way we looked at disability, not just in the UK but worldwide. Back in the seventies Ann and Derek forged an alliance to help millions of disabled people to access the information and advice they needed to improve the quality of their lives. Their hard work and determination were always admirable, and the *Directory for Disabled People* which she and Derek produced is testament to her commitment and vision to improve the lives of so many disabled people in the UK. Today we pay tribute to Ann’s contribution, support and friendship, but also to what she achieved. Ann helped put disabled people on the map, and made them more visible. For that we must say a big ‘thank you’ to Ann Darnbrough.

Lady Irene Morris: “I consider it an honour and a privilege to pay tribute to Ann. She was a very remarkable lady. Indeed, first off, when she asked ‘what about the vegetarian option?’ I thought ‘what’s that?’. So I was on a learning curve from the word go. Ann had a very perceptive insight into the problems not only of disabled people, but of other groups in society, and, in particular, the plight of the many young disabled people who, prior to the CSDP Act, were frequently cared for in long-stay homes and hospital wards, shared frequently with elderly residents. Inevitably they were without the companionship and society of other children of their own age group and generation. Long-stay hospitalisation was something that Ann knew all too well from the personal experience of her own early life, and she knew very well that it didn’t matter just how kind and well-meaning many of the nursing staff who cared for them were, the situation was none the less far from ideal.

I first met Ann at a meeting convened by Duncan Guthrie, then Director of Action Research, who was among the earliest and most active of a number of people who recognised and understood the need for statutory provision to help the many complex and varied needs of disabled people in the UK, later embodied into the CSDP Act. They did so much to formulate the CSDP Act and help Alf get things on the road. Duncan recognised the practical need for a gathering of provision of precise information as to the number of disabled people in the country, and the need for access to collated and accurate information about the many disability organisations, their

locations, and the sources of help and various areas of expertise and aims, and so much more that came to be embedded in the publication in 1977 of Ann and Derek's *Directory for Disabled People*, later in Ann's setting up of the National Information Forum, and much later the pioneering NIF website, an invaluable information resource for disabled people, their families and carers.

I have a feeling that advantages and progress in social provision are for the most part driven by what, for the sake of brevity, I can only describe as "the unreasonable behaviour of the unreasonable man – or woman" – who when they feel strongly or identify a need don't back off but persist. I think Ann and Derek's quiet persistence advanced that progress. Inevitably there is always more and ever more to be done, particularly now, to protect and defend the hard-won advances in social provision for vulnerable people that are so very much under attack in today's economic climate. At his inauguration, U Thant, one-time Director General of the United Nations, spelled out a wish list of ten aims. I will read just one: "I wish that more love, compassion and understanding will guide the management of human affairs." I'm sure that Ann would have seconded that."

Derek

Ann, over the years, wore many hats. I remember being particularly impressed by the power of her speaking. I first became aware of it when, over the phone, she devastatingly tore into a miscreant landlord. Whereas she was the most amiable of friends, she could be withering with anyone who sought to take advantage of her: a no-nonsense directness which would have done credit even to someone from Yorkshire. She could rise to any occasion. I vividly recall an address at a Multiple Sclerosis Society conference where she was told she had only a few minutes before lunch was due, and she delivered her address at electrifying speed. In Liverpool, I marvelled when, in Williamson Square, alongside Ken Dodd, she won over the audience by recounting how, as we drove over Runcorn Bridge, I had said "You are now entering hallowed ground". Later, speaking at Edinburgh's Murrayfield Stadium, she needed all her great strength to get her message across.

One of her most progressive endeavours was to champion the right of disabled people to enjoy a sex life. Withal, she was herself quite interested in sex, and was closely involved with SPOD (Sexual Problems of Disabled People) and Tuppy Owens' Outsiders Club. We researched and wrote together *The Sex Directory*, which I personally esteem as the best of our joint work.

Here is an extract from a BBC recording of Ann speaking about sex and disability.

Then there were six editions of *Motoring and Mobility for Disabled People* for RADAR, and a strong link with Artsline, the London-based organisation helping disabled people to share in the enjoyment of art, theatre and cinema. For the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind she wrote *Under a Drumstick Tree* and *Campaign against Blinding Malnutrition in India*. Somehow she was also secretary of the International Council on Disability, writing *ICOD News*, and an enthusiastic member of Tripscope, led by our friend Claudia Flanders, offering travel and transport advice to disabled people.

Trevor

Time now to mention Ann's thoughts on religion, thoughts that coincide with mine, as a humanist, about the importance of using science and reason. While crediting the kindness of many Christian foster parents, Ann was characteristically forthright in *A Rebellious Disposition*:

“The stance of the godly – the whole fabric of religious belief – is surely no more than wishful thinking, unsupported by a single shred of reliable evidence. Indeed, all experience tends to negate their perception. Although our hopes can be fulfilled from time to time, there is no basis for thinking that prayers are ‘answered’. Virgins do not give birth, nor corpses return to life, good people do not necessarily prosper, nor evil-doers founder. The basic functioning of our world follows fixed, natural laws, but it is evident that nature can also be indiscriminate, random and disastrous and that the notion of an all-powerful god in control of events is simply preposterous.”

One of the most disastrous tendencies that got Ann wound-up was inequality. She had this to say:

“While some attempt has been made to lift the poorest members of our population out of absolute poverty [she was writing in 2006], the disparity between those at the bottom and those at the top inexorably widens as the rich are allowed, indeed encouraged, to become immoderately richer. This inequality particularly favours men, who continue vastly to outnumber women in lucrative top jobs...I believe a healthy nation, one that is prosperous in the best sense of the word, cannot be built on greed. A nation state based on the pursuit of affluence will surely die. True wealth is made up of the contributions of all its citizens to the common good: to each other as neighbours, to strangers around us through kindness and to the wellbeing of the state through fair and equitable taxation. No citizen should be valued more highly than another.”

And, of course, Ann was an enthusiastic member of the Green Party. She writes only briefly about it in *A Rebellious Disposition*, but politics played a huge part in her life, and the book is infused with her radical views: on human rights and women's rights in particular, the folly of war, the need for socialist values alongside respect for the environment, and her distaste for the hereditary principle enshrined in the monarchical system. She writes of "working to turn our vision of a fair and sustainable society into reality".

Basically, she thought that the Greens needed more socialist principles and that Labour should have more of green. She took a leading part in setting up a Red/Green movement in which Ken Livingstone and Robin Cook were prominent. But while her views may seem to some to have been unorthodox, there was never anything threatening about Ann's demeanour. We are fortunate to have a written contribution from another enthusiastic Green, Karen Westbrook, cut off from us today by the disastrous floods. She remembers Ann's contribution to green politics while, in Chesham, they imagined a better future and had fun:

Karen Westbrook: "As we stumble through life we bump into key people who have a big influence. Ann was one of those. I was an anti-war campaigner at Greenham Common, unsure who to vote for. The big three parties all wanted nuclear weapons. So I went to Dr Challoner's School in Amersham to hear a pre-election debate with all the candidates. I had glazed over, wishing I could escape from the rhetoric I was hearing. Then Ann, the only woman in a sea of men, spoke.

Ann was eloquent and passionate. What I heard about the Green Party was so inspiring, I joined the Party there and then. I went to local party meetings where Ann was always interested in my opinion and my confidence grew. Then Ann suggested I become the local parties press officer. As a group, we went to national conferences and I found my political voice; encouraged all the while by Ann. I started to stand in local elections and moved to Cornwall where I joined the Cornish Green Party. In 1994 I stood as the European Parliamentary candidate for Cornwall and Plymouth, (as it was then) and found myself talking on National T.V and radio. All thanks to Ann. Thank you Ann for leading me to life I now live. I will picture you picnicking on Ivinghoe Beacon on a summer day, laughing."

Trevor

One of Ann's most interesting roles, for many years, was that of 'agony aunt' for the newspaper *Disability Now*. I am pleased to introduce Mary Wilkinson, a trustee of the National Information Forum, to tell us something of the paper, and Ann's contribution:

Mary Wilkinson: "Last month the Guardian ran a story about a deaf couple. They went through a tricky birth at University College Hospital, London, without the help of a British Sign Language interpreter. Over the next 16 days that mother and baby were in hospital, apparently no interpreter was provided for things like doctor's rounds or breast feeding instruction. Paul Redfern of the British Deaf Association found it very worrying that in this day and age when most of us take access to information for granted, a minority community should still be struggling to get it.

Ann would have empathised with the couple. Disabled herself, her anger at the shoddy service they received would have been channelled into telling them their rights under the Equality Act.

That combination of empathy, anger and expert knowledge was what made Ann such a good 'agony aunt'. She joined *Disability Now* (DN as we called it) in September 1991, and wrote the Share Your Problems page for 14 years, airing people's troubles and advising them on where to go for help.

Her very first answers shook a few branches. Social services had told a young disabled mother that she could have her child back home if she could manage. Ann pointed out that it was social services' responsibility to advise on adaptations and aids that would help the mother cope; she suggested contacting a local centre, one of the few run by disabled people themselves. A young disabled man about to be married was worried about having no sexual experience, so she put him on to a small charity that advised disabled people about sexual relationships. For most people, disability and sex was a no-go area, even in 1991.

"I am totally committed to the belief that information can empower", Ann told her readers. That jibed with the ethos of DN, where we covered news of the battles for benefits and disability legislation as well as facts and opinion on everything from motoring to sports and the arts. Ann helped DN to be taken seriously in the disability world. DN's publisher, The Spastics Society, later Scope, was often condemned by equality campaigners as a patronising charity run by non-disabled people for people with cerebral palsy and their families. DN got tarred with the same brush. To its credit, the charity allowed DN to expand and reach out to any disabled person. Most preciously, all but one CEO gave us freedom to write what we wanted. If they hadn't, feisty spirits like Ann wouldn't have joined us. With their support, we went on growing, attracting more disabled staff, launching campaigns, creating a website.

So I'm very grateful to Ann. She was special."

Trevor

Which brings us, lastly, to Ann's final, thirty-year commitment to the provision of information. In *A Rebellious Disposition* she calls it 'Information for Empowerment' and points out that those who are information poor are frequently those who need information most. In 1981, the UN brought forth the International Year of Disabled Persons. Ann knew that it was coming, and had already brought together a team enthusiastic about the importance of information. She wrote to the IYDP organising committee to say that information had not been included in its agenda and that this omission should be remedied. The committee's response was to welcome the thought, and to ask Ann to take on the organisation of appropriate action. Thus the National Information Forum was born. It was to remain Ann's deepest commitment until illness intervened. By then the government, at least for those with internet access, had largely taken on the co-ordination of information through its gov.uk website. For much of its time, Maurice Glassman served as chair of the Forum's management committee, working closely and harmoniously with Ann. He has kindly agreed to talk about the experience:

Maurice Glassman: "It has already been said that back in the 70s and 80s Ann was already working to improve the provision of information to disabled people, meeting various groups who had or should have had an interest. Her determination, I think, was driven considerably by her personal experience. The International Year of Disabled People of 1981 was a great concept, but Ann was very concerned that no specific activity had been defined regarding the need for information for people with disabilities. I can't remember how, and only vaguely where, but we first met in 1982. Over coffee she outlined some possibilities of doing something about information provision. Then, in 1983, she gathered together an information working group at the King's Fund to discuss the concept of a national information forum, calling for the support of a number of trustees, some of whom I'm glad to see tonight. Later, she stood down as chair and became its unpaid director. Over time she extended the Forum's remit to go well beyond that of reforming the provision of information to disabled people, to include any other group disadvantaged by lack of information.

That's a diluted account of the origin and growth of the Forum. What matters is Ann's ability, enthusiasm, and determination to improve and develop its role and professionalism, and to enlarge its outreach. She organised conferences and award ceremonies, and somehow managed to attract top speakers, sort out suitable locations and facilities, always without charge. A lot of work, but hugely successful. She was equally good at finding office accommodation, mostly for

free, as well as getting funding for staffing, projects and numerous publications. As you will already have gathered, the production of literature was a major activity. Ann and Derek, between them, produced an impressive range of booklets, brochures, leaflets, guides and even a video. I remember that someone said that the universe could be described as a great information processing machine. I think Ann might have liked that.

On a personal note, I would like to say that Ann was a long time colleague and friend, and I was particularly honoured when she invited me to accompany her, together with Derek and Philip, when she received her OBE. A final observation to say that since we first met I have been very much aware of Derek's invaluable and inimitable support to Ann, as well his guidance, on top of being the Honorary Treasurer among many other things. And now he continues his good work through his wide ranging observations and reporting in his monthly e.mail news briefing, which I hope you all get. And finally it remains only to offer our deepest sympathies to Derek and to Philip.

Trevor

Ram Gidoomal, President of the National Information Forum has sent the following tribute:

Professor Ram Gidoomal: "I met Ann in connection with her work for the National Information Forum. Ann was a social entrepreneur and pioneer and I greatly valued her leadership of the NIF. I still have the many reports and publications of the NIF and amongst other things, admired her campaign for disabled people and their access to good, timely and relevant information. Her contributions in this sector were significant. She had a sacrificial and servant heart and I know how much she had to persist to get the necessary funds and the ears of policy makers in government.

"She will be missed. I am so sorry not to be able to join you at this memorial celebration to personally pay tribute to Ann's life. I will forever remember her gracious and sometimes mischievous smile, her humility and the passion and commitment with which she pursued her campaigns for justice and equality."

Trevor

Sir Bert Massie, who worked with Ann in the 1980s and 1990s, has paid tribute to her in the latest issue of *All Together Now!*

Sir Bert Massie: "Her death deprives disabled people of the energy and contribution of a remarkable woman. She understood that despite the development of the internet, disabled

people, for a variety of reasons, often have difficulty accessing information about services which could dramatically improve their lives.”

Tom Dowling, the editor, adds his own appreciation, noticing that Ann “spent most of her life fighting social injustice, constantly speaking up for the underdog, and continually challenging bureaucracy.” He remembers that Ann pointed out that “people in deep hardship generally lack the skills and the initiative to seek out information, and any inquisitiveness they may have is often blunted by their crushing disadvantage. Their isolation is further compounded by the fact that those who have the information tend to wait to be asked for it.”

Tom goes on to tell readers that, outside her disability work, Ann was an enthusiastic supporter of charities including Liberty, Dignity in Dying, the British Humanist Association, CND, Prisoners Abroad, Amnesty International, the Movement for the Abolition of War, and Free Tibet. But since the early 70s her main passion was directed towards improving ways of getting information to underprivileged people, receiving an OBE for her work in 2002. On a personal note he has written amongst other things to say:

“When I was starting out in journalism my old editor, Albert Thorneycroft, told me that through journalism I would meet thousands of people from all backgrounds – “mostly sinners,” he scowled – “but if you are lucky, maybe, just maybe, a saint or two along the way!”

Well, we all know that Ann would be laughing her head off at the thought of being acclaimed a *saint*! – probably horrified, too. From what I can remember she wasn’t particularly comfortable receiving an OBE! And I very much doubt that she would relish the thought of swanning around, dressed up as a saint – though she’d definitely see the benefits of the wings!

In an interview with me a few years ago, Ann said:

“Information is now a commodity in such ample supply that many of us feel overwhelmed by it. We know what it is to experience information overload. But it is a revolution that has passed many people by. Alongside information affluence we have information poverty, and the paradox is that those who are information poor are frequently those who need information most!”

We've all lost a true champion. But I know that Ann's light will shine on – especially through the pages of *All Together NOW!*

Thanks, Ann – like it or not, you're my saint . . ."

Trevor: This evening we have heard reflections about a woman of indomitable spirit who triumphed over adversity, and focused her attention on other people's problems rather than her own. Yehudi Menuhin said that people needed "a good heart and a sensible head". Ann Darnbrough exemplified both. In Derek's own words: "She was no stranger to controversy, but her memory will be treasured by those who knew her. Her death, to the world at large, may be no more than a splash in the ocean of world events, but to those who loved her it has come as a tsunami."