

Humanising Language Teaching

Remembering Susan Holden. RIP

Remembering Susan Holden



Photo by Klaudia Bednárová



Words on Susan Holden, spoken at her funeral,

Friday, 18th August 2023

I first met Susan in the 1970s with her partner Donn Byrne. We were all in the same field of ELT or English Language Teaching. That is, particularly, the teaching of English as a Foreign or Second Language.

Two terms that describe Susan well are (1) multifaceted and (2) enigmatic. The many facets of who she was and what she did show in the response of one of her ELT friends to the local, Callander, notice of her death: 'Didn't they realise

that she had her own publishing company and was an international figure? 'And my response to that: 'I bet you didn't realise the place she had in the community of Callendar and that she was a local figure'. The enigma has kept emerging in the number of times a family member, friend or colleague has said in response to an anecdote or memory 'Well, I never knew that!'

In her professional life, Susan was many things – an engaging teacher, an inspiring speaker and teacher educator, an author, the editor of an influential practical magazine for teachers of English as a Foreign Language – the director (twice) of her own publishing company, a person trusted by a major publisher (Macmillan) with establishing an international list of coursebooks and other material, and less happily (and briefly) a figure within a corporate machine when one substantial and successful publisher was engulfed by giant one with very different values. This was when Susan once more, and very sensibly, set up as an independent publisher, and independent she remained.

Many many ELT Friends have been in contact with memories and appreciations of Susan's role in their professional and personal lives. I have deliberately called them ELT Friends because personal and professional were so well entwined. I couldn't possibly fit even the list of names into the time available, let alone do justice to what individuals have wanted to say. Instead, I thought I would, firstly, refer you to the printed album that we have compiled of collected tributes that you will be able to see after the ceremony and, secondly, pick out here the themes that have been so clearly emerging.

Susan was immensely creative and gifted herself. This can be seen in the vast output of books, articles and other materials that from the 1970s to the present day she authored, often alone, sometimes with others especially with her partner Donn. However, she was also gifted with the ability to see the potential in others and the generosity to want to nurture it rather than merely harness it or take credit for the use that was made of it. So many people have said 'She encouraged me to ... try making my first teaching materials, write my first article, share my ideas with others in my first presentation' and some have said, beyond that, 'Without her I could not have achieved what I did'. I am amongst them. As an author, it was a delight to have a commissioning editor who not only said 'Yes, why not?' 'Let's do it!' but who also had the professional nous and expertise to be a guiding, formative, hand and not just a permissive motivator of eager novices.

Her last major professional engagement was with a European research group tracing and celebrating the history of Humanistic values in English language Teaching. She was a valued contributor and advisor to this group, but it is typical of her modesty that I believe it was quite far on into the project before the organisers realised just how influential Susan herself had been as a proponent of this broad and enriching approach to education. Although plans to record her own memories and reflections were sadly cut off by her advancing illness, I think her work there as a team member as well as contributor will live on as a very fitting memorial to her values and achievements.

As for me, she was a wonderful colleague, advisor, meal companion, guest, hostess, co-conspirator, fellow observer of the human condition and friend for over 40 years and I am going to miss her way beyond what these words can say.

Shelagh Rixon



I first met Susan in Italy back in the early 1970's, when I was working for the British Council in Milan, along with Donn Byrne in Rome. At that time, Susan was working in Latina south of Rome, before moving to Rome as her relationship with Donn gathered pace.

Those were the heady days of the Communicative movement with notions and functions all a-buzzing, and David Wilkins flavour of the month. In Italy this sparked the formation of LEND (Lingua e Nuova Didattica) in which Donn

played a central part. I think I must have met Susan at one of the early LEND conferences, possibly in the Villa Falconieri in Frascati. However, that may be, we remained friends up until her untimely death.

Her background was in drama in education, having graduated from the Central School of Speech and Drama, and this is reflected in what was I think, her first book, *Drama in Language Education*, published by Longman in 1980. She also co-authored books like *Insight* (1976) with Donn. She continued to write for publication for the rest of her career, with numerous collaborative ventures, including the Macmillan *Topics* series.

But it is as editor that she will probably be best remembered. Many will recall her work with Macmillan, in particular the two *Selections from Modern English Teacher* in the 1980s. And most influential, her edited collections of papers from the highly successful series of British Council/Italian National Conferences in Bologna, Milan and Sorrento, organised by Shelagh Rixon. These included *New ELT Ideas* (1982), *Focus on the Learner* (1983), *Teaching and the Teacher* (1984), *Teaching Literature* (1985), *Literature and Language* (1987). And in 2009 she edited a retrospective with Modern English Publications: *Ten Years On: The Italian National Conferences 1982-1991*. It is hard for anyone who did not live through this period of methodological ferment to fully grasp the excitement and creative energy which characterised it. And the importance of these publications as agents of change.

Later, Susan founded her own small publishing company, Swan Communication, and published, among other things, the very timely book, *The Non-Native Speaker* by Peter Medgyes.

Anyone who ever worked with Susan as their editor will remember how she regarded the role of editor as that of co-creator. She had a keen critical intellect, combined with publishing experience and acumen, creative energy – and boundless empathy and support for her authors. A publishing dynamo!

Thinking of Susan called to mind Malcolm Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point*, in which he explores the genesis and spread of new ideas. He identifies three kinds of agents: Connectors – those people who have a gift for contact with many other people, and who facilitate the exchange of information; Mavens – people who know a lot, who act as information brokers; and Persuaders – people who get out there and actively promote the new ideas. To my mind, Susan was all these things: she had a vast network of friends and fellow professionals, she was extremely well-informed about her chosen field, and as a speaker and teacher trainer, she made it her business to share actively what she knew.

I shall remember dear Susan for her acerbic wit, her generosity of spirit and for her astonishing energy. She was a truly exceptional person and I count myself lucky to have been her friend.

Alan Maley



Susan was our editor at Macmillan on an intermediate coursebook called *Insights* (1989) and subsequently on a three-book series, *The Macmillan Short Course Programme* (1993). We could not have wished for a more supportive and sympathetic editor. Our concept for the series was to reflect the cultural encounters experienced by learners coming to the UK for a short course. Susan immediately got this, and her approach was designed to enable us to write the books we wanted to write regardless of the conventions of the time in terms of content. Susan was herself a prolific writer, and consequently, working with her was always more like working with a fellow writer than with an editor. In addition to her expertise as an editor, Susan's own vision of the power of language learning, coupled with her ability to recognise the writer's vision, made her a rare figure in ELT publishing.

In the late 1990s, Susan gave me the opportunity to collaborate via email with co-writers in Hungary and Slovakia on country-specific practice books for the *Criss Cross* series for Central and Eastern Europe. This unique series, through

Susan's inspiration, overcame the financial challenge of country-specific publishing for individual countries in the region with a package comprising a standard coursebook and country-specific practice books, all published by Huber Verlag in Germany. By the time I had written the advanced coursebook for the series, the Criss Cross project was faltering, but such was her faith in the material, Susan brought it out in a stand-alone edition with the title *Changing Skies* through what was by then her own imprint, Swan Communication.

What I recall most vividly and with the greatest affection and appreciation was Susan's readiness to respond to my requests for guidance and support on two projects I was involved in as an external consultant: a cultural studies syllabus produced by a group of 60 teachers for Bulgarian English-medium schools, and a textbook produced by a group of a dozen Hungarian teachers following their immersive experience on a course in Exeter. Both were quite idiosyncratic ventures with negligible commercial potential. But in both cases, Susan promptly stepped in generously contributing her time and energy to enable British Council Bulgaria and a local publisher to produce the syllabus in a handsome loose-leaf binder (*Branching Out* British Council and Tilia 1998), and herself publishing the highly unconventional Hungarian textbook (*Zoom In: Looking into Britain through Hungarian eyes* Swan Communication 2001), with all of the teachers' very personal visual and verbal material intact.

Susan was one of the first people to be interviewed when we launched TransformELT with a series of video interviews on professional transformations (<https://youtu.be/MrHblw34Elw>). Then last year at IATEFL Belfast, the tables were turned when she interviewed me for a European project she was working on – more of a chat between old friends than an interview, which has had to be re-shot because the original recording was punctuated by Susan's excessive back-channelling, reacting to anecdotes and ideas with recognition, agreement and enthusiasm! We were in contact via email again just a couple of weeks ago, discussing the project, which I had taken over from her, but despite having relinquished her role, she was still open-heartedly offering support and advice. Working with Susan was always a professional and personal pleasure, and I will miss her greatly.

Alan Pulverness



In the early 1990s I became convinced that teachers whose native language is not English can serve the ELT profession as well as their native colleagues. With this in mind I prepared a synopsis on the subject and sent it to OUP in the hope that they would take to the idea. And indeed, they seemed to be keen and asked me to submit two sample chapters. I did, and then they asked for another two chapters, and then yet another two. By the time the manuscript was almost complete, OUP decided not to publish the book. I was disconsolate.

Not long afterwards I bumped into Susan at a conference, and she asked why I looked so sad. When I explained she said, "Why don't you send ME the manuscript?" That is Macmillan where she was the chief editor. I did. In two days' time she replied, "Super! We'll publish it!" And, lo and behold, half a year later the book saw the light of day.

When it went out of print, she persuaded the German Hueber Verlag to republish it and some twenty years later she asked, "What if we had a third edition?" "I'd love to, but who would publish it?" "Me," Susan said, "Swan Communication." "And who will sponsor it?" I asked. "Who else? Myself," she replied matter-of-factly.

Whilst working on the updated version, we met online, over the phone and in person at various places: Budapest, Elche, Brno, Paris, Barnstaple, Callander. When the rehashed version came out, she said, "What if we gave each participant a free copy at the next IATEFL conference?" I agreed. So, she set up a stand and gave a freebie to well over 2,000 participants in five days. She covered all the costs out of her own pocket, lock, stock and barrel.

In the mid-90s, as Central European countries were knocking on the door of the European Union, I thought it would be quite an idea to produce a coursebook series for the four most likely candidates: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The coursebooks would be the same, I said to Susan, but the practice books should be written by local

authors. At the urge of Susan Hueber Verlag soon gave us the go-ahead sign. As a first step she invited about a dozen potential authors from the countries involved to her medieval house in Newbury to discuss what the series could look like. As we were spooning her lentil soup, we agreed that the best title would be *Criss Cross*.

Then we buckled down to work with Susan zig-zagging from Warsaw through Prague and Bratislava to Budapest, indefatigably driving her own car, plus to Hueber Verlag in Germany whenever necessary. It was a horrendous task that involved discussions with at least two dozen authors. Donn Byrne was the main author, but Susan undertook the task of writing all the teacher's books. And as the five levels (from beginners to advanced) were being published, she kept running workshops for teachers on how to use the material. How on earth did she manage all that, I often wondered. The series proved to be moderately successful but might have become a blockbuster had it been published a few years earlier when there were more similarities than differences between these Central European countries.

For nearly six decades Susan was a central figure in the ELT world across the five continents even though she kept a low profile. She was much appreciated and loved by everyone, partly because she never vied for titles and recognition. She would prefer listening to being listened to. And she just kept smiling with her genuine smile which warmed the hearts of so many of us.

Péter Medgyes



It's almost impossible to imagine our field of ELT without Susan. Her contribution has been immeasurable. She has been part of the scene in so many different guises since the seventies and eighties. Whether it was organising and masterminding huge conferences in Italy or giving young teachers and novice writers a voice in *Modern English Teacher* and in her themed collections on ESP, Teacher Training, Teaching Children, she spent years at the cutting edge of developments, all the while using her own considerable experience to write material, sometimes herself and sometimes in partnership with others.

If you wanted advice on publishing, Susan was there and ready to help, if your professional association needed guidance or support, Susan was there and ready to help, if you were a non-native speaker who wanted your professional voice to be heard more widely, Susan was there and ready to help. She was there at conferences, there at the end of a telephone or an email message, there, always, when it mattered. Now that she is no longer there, we will miss her dreadfully. In the best sense, she was one of a kind. She was modest, unassuming, kind and generous with her time, but could be tough and decisive when she needed to be. I liked and admired her, and she will always be a part of my own professional story.

Rod Bolitho



For Susan

You came to Japan in the late 1970s and, at a staff meeting, encouraged teachers to write down their good ideas and send them in to *Modern English Teacher*, the magazine you edited. Back in the UK, in 1982, I enthused to my husband about a vocabulary review game that I had just made up that worked well in class. He remembered what you said in Japan and encouraged me to write the idea down and send it to MET. I did and was absolutely thrilled to get a friendly letter of acceptance from you. The idea was published in 1984 and you went on to print some more of my vocabulary review games too soon after. It gave me such a feeling of confidence. Whenever we met at conferences ever after I thanked you for getting me started with ELT publishing and you always laughed as if it was really nothing. But for me it was really something.

Encouraged by your example as editor of MET, I became an editor too. I hope just as encouraging and friendly and kind a one as you always were.

You supported the very start of *The Fair List, UK*. More recently supporting the *Humanising Language Teaching* project... as always with a kind editorial eye.

Susan, all my ELT life you have been there, ahead of me, showing me, it could be done, and done in a personable, collaborative, friendly and humorous way.

Thank you.

Tessa Woodward



I first met Susan Holden in the late 1980's, when we were both working for Macmillan, the publisher, in different areas. Already a big name in the English Language Teaching world, in part thanks to the ELT journal *Modern English Teacher*, Macmillan had hired Susan to begin the development of an international English Language Teaching catalogue, reflecting their ambition to become a leading force in ELT publishing worldwide, rather than a publisher of local ELT texts in places like Nigeria and Mexico.

I was already living in Mexico City and in charge of Macmillan's affairs in Latin America. Susan and I had numerous healthy disagreements on how to approach the market with her catalogue, and I was soon impressed by her charm, her perseverance, and, in a positive sense, her plain stubbornness. In due course we worked together very successfully, both contributing to Macmillan's fast and far-reaching expansion in Latin America, opening companies in Brazil, Peru and Argentina in the course of the 1990's.

Although Susan wrote, co-authored, or collaborated in the publication of over seventy books in her lifetime, I mainly knew her as a Publishing Director and Sales Director. She was one of those rare people in publishing to be able to combine academic knowledge and experience with a steely sense of profitability. Not one to suffer fools gladly, she went to great pains to win the hearts and minds of authors and customers. Her style was always "Have you ever thought of.....?", not the "I think you should..." of some of her colleagues.

Susan quickly became well-known and admired in Brazil and Mexico, and, to a lesser extent, in Peru and Argentina. She became a fixture at local English Language Teaching events such as BrazTESOL. Her talks were always well-attended, and she became the friend and confidante of many of the leading lights of the language teaching world, especially in Brazil, where she contributed hugely to Macmillan's growth in collaboration with Cristina Roberts, the local Managing Director.

Susan was interested in everybody and everything to do with the English Language Teaching world. She not only analysed the value chain but sought to build on the strengths of intermediaries like book distributors, often scorned by

publishers as mere logistics suppliers. She published ELT methodology books with SBS, Brazil's leading distributor of books for language teaching, and Delti, their equivalent in Mexico. Some of her books were translated into Spanish and Portuguese.

Our relationship over time became more personal than professional, and Susan and I kept in touch long after she had left full-time employment in the publishing industry.

I believe Susan led an active and satisfying life, and found it hard to slow down, even in the final years of her life. She is now at rest after a long illness, and I celebrate the insights she shared and the joy she brought to her many friends around the world.

Christopher West



It is with a mixture of gratitude and fond remembrance that I write about my dear friend and collaborator, Susan Holden. Our journey together began years ago when I had the privilege of working as the Academic Director at Cultura Inglesa São Paulo, Brazil. Susan, an exceptional writer and editor, was at that time engaged in producing a course book series tailored specifically for Brazilian learners. Her dedication to understanding the needs of our students and incorporating valuable feedback from teachers was unparalleled, and I was always impressed by her commitment and passion for making a meaningful impact on language education.

Over the years, our paths continued to cross, and it was a true honour when Susan extended an invitation to co-author "Teaching English Today: Contexts and Objectives." Collaborating with her on this project was an incredibly enriching and transformative experience because, from the very beginning, I could witness Susan's generosity, openness to ideas, enthusiasm and eagerness to embrace diverse perspectives into our work. Her support and encouragement throughout the entire writing process, as well as her undeniable good mood, were invaluable, and Susan's genuine concern for language teachers of all backgrounds and contexts was an underlying principle in every aspect of our conversations. She cared deeply about professional development and sought to create resources that would empower all teachers in their classrooms. And that is exactly what she did.

Working side by side with Susan was an amazing journey. Her warmth and compassion fostered an environment where creativity thrived, and the results were a testament to her dedication. Her commitment to the field of language education left an indelible mark on the lives of countless educators and learners. I will always think of Susan with heartfelt gratitude and admiration. Goodbye for now, dear Susan.

Vinicius Nobre



I'd known Susan since the 80's. We worked together in Brazil, Argentina and Peru. I cannot recall how many IATEFL, TESOL, BRAZ-TESOL we attended together. In Argentina we presented Modern Language Teacher Magazine to the market for teachers who were willing to teach as well as Teacher Training Schools.

She wrote a series for Macmillan Brazil with great success because she understood the Brazilian market very well and the Brazilian teachers in different teaching ELT situations.

She was a writer, an excellent speaker and a teacher who understood the market and the need of the student and the ELT teacher. Great loss for ELT.

From being an experienced ELT professional of great admiration, with time we developed a huge friendship that lasted until last week.

We travelled together professionally as well as friends in various countries in Europe and Latin America. I treasured Susan's friendship very much. She was my mentor and very good friend. Never to be forgotten.

R.I.P. Susan.

Cristina Roberts



Susan's death came as very sad news to us, both professionally and personally. In all her wide-ranging contributions as an author, lecturer, editor and teacher educator, she always managed the delicate balance between evidence-based practice, pedagogic creativity, and a clear focus on the humanity and agency of learners and teachers. Early on, MET enabled practitioners like ourselves to exchange experiences and ideas when such opportunities were rare, and Susan continued to support active dialogue between researchers and teachers throughout her life. We were also fortunate that she was a valued friend for nearly half a century. Her death is a serious loss to us and to very many others.

Catherine Walter and Michael Swan



I first met Susan in her professional editorial and publishing capacity well over 40 years ago when she accompanied her husband, Donn Byrne, to give a talk at the British Council, Lisbon where I'd recently been employed as a young teacher. I remember Susan from that initial encounter as fearsomely intelligent and knowledgeable about ELT with a sharp, enquiring mind, lively curiosity and genuine interest in finding out about what we teachers actually did in the classroom and why. And, although I didn't realise it at the time, that approach and attitude was a hallmark of Susan's professional life, whether working as editor, publisher, writer, teacher educator or conference speaker: her ability to interrogate

theory and research and apply it to the real needs, concerns and constraints of classroom practitioners in an understanding and humane way.

Over the years, I met up regularly with Susan at IATEFL and other conferences and we invariably always found time for a coffee and chat together. Although I never worked directly with Susan, she was incredibly kind and generous to me with her professional advice and support, and I know that I am one of many in this respect. She also had a wicked sense of humour which built a delightful bond and always made those encounters even more enjoyable. Susan was also immensely thoughtful: on several occasions she dropped me a line with comments and feedback after she'd been to one of my talks and, when I was slightly apprehensive about becoming President of IATEFL in 2013, her view of having a person involved in teaching young learners in this role, to enable IATEFL to reach more teachers globally, was tremendously encouraging.

Susan was also a long-time colleague and friend of my husband, Alan Matthews, and on several occasions, she came to have dinner with us at home. One time, in the early days, when we were living in a small flat in central Madrid, I remember her tolerating with great good humour the early evening antics of our two small children and even reading them a bedtime story. More recently, and indeed the last time we both saw Susan in an extended way, we spent much of an evening fondly reminiscing over events and people and how ELT and publishing have changed. Susan also kindly invited us to go and stay with her in Scotland although, due to the pandemic and various other reasons, that unfortunately never happened.

In many ways, the loss of Susan feels for me as if it marks the end of an era in ELT. Susan was special not only in her ELT knowledge, publishing, editorial and writing skills but also in her kindness and generosity in sharing this with others. Alan and I feel fortunate to have known Susan as a colleague and friend over so many years. She will be sorely missed by us and by many.

Carol Read



I first met Susan at the 50th IATEFL Conference in Birmingham in 2016 when Susan arrived with a stack of newly published books, namely *The Non-Native Teacher*, by Péter Medgyes. As this topic was becoming more and more important and well worthy of prolonged discussion and awareness-raising, I was delighted to see that this publication was being distributed for free to conference attendees by Swan Communication, a small but active publishing company founded by Susan. Susan's interest in humanistic language teaching, as well as emotional and social engagement were apparent in all that she did and republishing Péter's book was certainly a large part of the message she was passionate about getting across to others in the field. At the time, I was doing quite a bit of work with teachers in different countries and at one point Susan contacted me to ask if I needed more books to distribute. When I answered "yes", she said she would be driving through Austria, and she came to visit one afternoon with a box of books. I will always remember that afternoon (as well as other times we spent chatting together at conferences in different European cities). I am very grateful that I got to know Susan and feel strongly that her memory will be a blessing to all of us who knew and worked with her.

Marjorie Rosenberg



In the year I trained as an EFL teacher in Manchester 39 years ago, Susan edited and published a book "Teaching and the Teacher". It was a collection of articles that came out of a Bologna British Council conference in Italy where, in Susan's words, many of the sessions were done by Italian teachers and teacher trainers.

In the preface to the book Susan wrote: "At so many conferences there is tension between the organisers and the publishers but here, because the collaboration is total, there is none, and the usual quibbles over what is or not a "commercial" talk do not arise." Collaboration was something very important to Susan, which she valued more than top-down models of teacher training and materials writing.. She wrote that she hoped the book "will stimulate, interest or amuse teachers and teacher trainers in Italy and elsewhere.

Susan was one of the giants of ELT and she made a huge contribution to our profession. As a publisher, she stayed very close to teachers and to teacher associations and she was not at all driven by narrow "commercial" aims. Her vision was to contextualise materials in a wider intercultural and educational framework, and she was never afraid of taking on issues such as migration, refugees and nationalism, issues so important to raise with young people in the world we live in today.

She came to the first IATEFL-Hungary conference in 1991 in Kecskemét and on many other occasions too up to her last one, entitled ENGaged, shortly before the pandemic in Budapest in 2019. I met her at the Queen's Head on the Kirkstone Pass in the Lake District together with Hős Csilla in the spring of 2000. It was there where Susan committed herself to a materials writing project in Hungary. We spent many happy weekends together with teachers working on a coursebook, supported by the British Council and written by Hungarian teachers and for Hungarian learners with Uwe Pohl and Alan Pulverness in Budapest.

Susan cared about "the local" a lot and she believed in a bottom-up approach to teacher training and the value of groups of teachers coming together in smaller places as well as meeting at annual conferences.

During the pandemic, I enjoyed listening to her talking about the events she attended locally in Callander which were about improving and caring for her adopted home in Scotland.

We always met up in her favourite hotel in Budapest, the Gellért, on the banks of the Danube three stops away from my adopted home in Budapest. She liked staying in nice art nouveau places whether in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic or wherever. We had that in common. She often drove to them by car from Scotland.

She also drove to Devon in 2016 to be with us on a SOL summer school where she did a talk in a small independent bookshop in Bideford about the book she published with Péter Medgyes, "The Non-Native Teacher". Péter was there with us, and she gave all the SOL teachers a copy. In a wonderful act of generosity, she also gave a free copy of the book to every person who attended IATEFL Glasgow in 2017, celebrating 50 years of IATEFL. She told me she wanted to give something back to the profession that had given her so much.

We also shared a love of Venice. During the pandemic, she showed me the building where she got married on the Grand Canal and one of my last emails from her was from Venice on May 1st, 2022.

"Am at Venice airport waiting for the Amsterdam and Edinburgh flights. Sad to leave...so good to revisit old haunts from the last half century".

We tried to meet in Bratislava in January this year, but she then fell ill.

Buon Viaggio Susan

I will miss you, your wisdom, your kindness and above all, your generosity, you gave me a lot.

Love

Mark Andrews



Susan Holden was like an Institution. Her professional career bears witness to five decades of playing a very active role in the communities of ELT/EFL teaching, teacher training and publishing. She was a very gifted individual, who shared her passion for life and work with others.

Susan will be remembered as a supportive editor by most people and a special friend by many. Someone, who through the publications she planned, wrote, coordinated, revised etc., had global impact on the materials for learning English as a foreign language and stayed in touch with teaching communities in various countries on different continents. She gave voice to teachers and touched the lives of novice authors like myself, with a magic wand called – Inspiration and Encouragement.

This is how I first heard about her. She was the editor of Modern English Teacher (MET), and I was a young, enthusiastic, non-native teacher of English at the British Council Studium at the University of Gdańsk in Poland. The year was 1983, and the Iron Curtain stronger than ever. I put down some teaching activities on paper as an antidote to the grim reality around me, and sent them to the editor of MET..., only to learn, sometime later, that my article was accepted for publication. I could feel my wings grow, and The Iron Curtain, suddenly, seemed less oppressive.

I was able to thank Susan for this - forty years later (!) - when we met in person as colleagues in a European project devoted to the presentation and preservation of humanistic teaching practices in EFL. It was invaluable to have Susan as project partner (with her publishing company – Swan Communication) and benefit from her experience and knowledge of the subject. But equally important was the possibility to talk informally and get to know Susan Holden as a person.

She had a strong, independent personality and was passionate about things that mattered to her, like art, drama, education or... driving. A force of nature which would escape “a frame”. A dedicated professional with a clear, analytical mind, sharp wit, and strong work ethos. A generous person with a gift for listening, and inspiring others. A wine expert and connoisseur who would never boast about her many talents. Someone we would look up to for advice and worry about when she was stretching her health limits. A person with a smile that could warm the cold and light the way...
The Person.

Thank you Susan for being the way you were.

Małgorzata Szwaj



It was indeed saddening to learn of the passing of Susan Holden. I first met Susan in 2012 at the Casa Thomas Jefferson conference in Brasilia. Susan was sitting outside writing and contemplating, as she so often was, and I sat down next to her and struck up a conversation. We have been friends ever since. Susan had such an energy and warmth about her that you could not help becoming fast friends with her. Her sense of humor, her sly smile and laugh, were infectious and always entertained me. Over the years, Susan and I met quite often in Brazil in the UK and at conferences all over the world and it was always a delight to know that we would meet at some conference in the near future. When I started the Independent Authors & Publishers, we brought Susan and Swan Communication aboard and she was an active member at our stand - always bringing an air of sophistication, history, and expertise to the conversations with delegates from IATEFL. When we held a live EFLtalks on the stage in Brazil, Susan had the crowd laughing with her straight-faced delivery of humorous situations that we as teachers and presenters often encounter. Another highlight was Susan's discussion at an IATEFL Poland conference with Hania about the native speaker issue, something that Susan and I often had lengthy discussions about.

Her work in ELT over the years is impressive with all that she has done as a writer, editor, publisher, trainer, and mentor, and I know that not only will I miss her deeply as someone I truly admire and consider a dear friend, but ELT and teachers everywhere will miss her input for years to come. I'm sure wherever Susan is now she is correcting someone's grammar and writing. Rest in peace and rock on my friend.

Rob Howard



Unlike most people, I honestly don't remember when and how I met Susan. Was it a conference? A teacher training course? Through HLT? No idea. I can see Susan did not publish in HLT when Mario was the editor, so it was not a contact I took over from Mario along with the magazine.

Anyway... I remember our contacts got closer and we had more frequent e-mail exchanges after IATEFL Brighton 2018. It was to do with the revival of the native versus not native debate, and the publication of the second edition of Peter's book. What followed were her trips to Canterbury to promote the book and to get the participants on our courses involved in the native / non-native debate. Then there was also promotion of *Teaching English Today*. She was energetic, ready to participate and engage, always willing to share because she was so passionate about reaching out. She wouldn't get tired of driving long distances and was not deterred by hardships. ...

In 2019 we joined forces and organised Native Vs Non-native Debate at IATEFL Poland, Wrocław 2018. It required a lot of careful planning, preparation, and sharing the workload. I loved working with Susan. Well organised, to the point, speaking her mind directly and at the same time in a very tactful and lady-like manner. I loved the way she agreed or disagreed with people, and the way she talked about those whom she had not warmed up to or disagreed with their ideas. Honest and tactful at the same time. Watching such an expert at work was a wonderful experience and a great inspiration for me.

When the Humanising Language Teaching Digital programme was launched, I was hoping that our cooperation would tighten even further. Unfortunately, HLT Mag and HLT Digital drifted apart but we kept in touch. Susan looked after our relationship and sought contact with me like for example in February 2022 when she was in Gdańsk, very close to my home. She sent me numerous warm and urging e-mails inviting me for a chat and hoping to meet up. At that time, I

was too busy, too hassled, and too dispirited, so I did not find the time. Then she reached out again hoping we would meet at IATEFL Poland in Poznań in September 2022. Again, I was too preoccupied by other things and did not attend... But then I thought we have plenty of time to catch up. Sooner or later...

So, now that Susan is gone I have been left with a feeling of regret and remorse. I am haunted by these lines by Jan Twardowski, a Polish poet:

Let us hurry to love people they depart so quickly

Leaving only their shoes and silence on the phone

(...)

Please do not be so certain that there is still time left

For certainty happens to be most uncertain

Hanna Kryszewska



I haven't known Susan as long as many others have; three years more or less. Three years or three days – it wouldn't have made any difference. We just clicked immediately.

She did not suffer fools gladly. She was belligerent, ethical, cantankerous, headstrong and, simply, brilliant. Intellectually and experimentally my superior, yet our conversations were dynamic, our eyes lighting up as we talked. Our teaching and learning beliefs were the meeting point. We both believed wholly in a humanistic approach to teaching and learning and all that goes with that. "Context, context, context", she would say. Context is everything.

I am still in awe of her. What a lady. How strong. Driving from Scotland to meet in Italy. Not many would do that. And boy oh boy could she put away the wine (perhaps that should be girl oh girl nowadays?).

We shared values. She lit my fire. She made me want to learn and then learn more. She made me laugh a lot. I loved her so much.

Nobody has ever got under my skin as easily as she did.

I will miss her terribly.

Julie Wallis



I first met Susan at IH in Shaftesbury Avenue in the 70s just as she took over MET. Over the many years since then she's been a colleague, writer, presenter, editor, but most importantly, friend. Often friendship was at a distance, because of Susan's, and to some extent my, insatiable appetite for travel. In her most recent incarnation, she was even a politician, embroiled in the seething local dramas of her Scottish home in Callender.

I'm just one of the many who counted Susan as a friend and can scarcely imagine she's gone. But she certainly leaves behind her a grand and widespread legacy amongst the many people whose lives she touched. Rest well, Susan.

Sue Jones



Susan Holden was an editor, publisher, author, public speaker, councillor, teacher, teacher trainer and to me, she was a dear friend. I only knew her for what was to become the latter years of her life, nevertheless the influence she had upon mine was remarkable. I know I am just one of many who have equal cause to credit her for having such a positive impact on their lives.

We were first thrown together in 2017 for a conference of English teachers in Paris – the TESOL France annual Colloquium – where we had been invited to co-host a discussion panel on the 'native/non-native teacher debate'. Susan was the wonderfully eloquent native, and I was, perhaps due to a combination of my Scandinavian background, an anomaly, to represent the non-native. Susan summed up the purpose of the discussion in a video saying it was to "encourage people to use their own experiences to talk about anything that they've come up against in their professional or personal lives." Susan's words would describe, not just the foundation of our personal friendship, but the important legacy she was to leave English teaching and the English Language Teaching world when she died on 21st July 2023.

Like for so many teachers of English as a second or other language, Susan's career hadn't exactly gone the way she had imagined when after school she had set her heart on becoming a theatre director. For a while she was on the right track, she trained as a drama teacher for schools in the UK and then went to Paris to research French mediaeval theatre.

Returning to London in the swinging sixties she found a job for an advertising agency preparing props and costumes for photo-shoots. But as John Lennon said, 'life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans' and Susan went off at a tangent to teach English in Italy, then Canada.

When we met many years later, we hit it off immediately. First introducing ourselves to one another on the phone ahead of Paris. Susan fondly recollected, how she'd been taken aback by my East Anglian enunciation, not a bit like the sing-song Swedish Chef hurty flurty bork bork bork, that of course I would have forgiven her had she expected it. That was the very purpose of our panel discussion. To identify ways to help combat such ignorance and preconceived notions and we successfully ruffled many feathers.

Our panel discussion was repeated in different cities giving us opportunities to socialise, having ¡A tapear! tapas and beers in Madrid, a city tour of Grenoble and dinner with Andrew and Csilla Jaray Benn until Susan came to my home in Hamburg to stay with Alma and me for a HELTA English at Work Conference.

Whenever Susan could, it seemed, she would drive, jumping at the opportunity to combine attending a teaching conference with a road trip visiting friends along the way. Hungary,

Poland, Switzerland, Italy, I had trouble keeping up with Susan's admirable wanderlust and free spirit that continued well into her later years.

Then in 2019 after IATEFL – an international gathering of English teachers from around the globe - in Liverpool, it was my turn to take a road trip, which took me to Susan's doorstep at her beautiful home, Teithside House, beside the river Theith. An 18th century stone 3-bay building set in a prominent position in Callander, a small town in central Scotland, made famous by the works of Sir Walter Scott, or perhaps Doctor Finlay; both of whom, I imagined may also have dallied there once upon a time.

Susan's journey to Callander, a curriculum vitae from those early days of theatre studies, was nothing short of an exhaustive list of achievement and recognition. From teaching she had gone on to found the magazine, Modern English Teacher which continues to thrive, she collaborated on training programmes with the British Council, ran one publishing company, then worked as publishing director for Macmillan ELT before setting up her own company (again) to produce and publish materials for Central Europe and Latin America.

Once in Callander, she ran her own publishing company, Swan Communication, re-publishing Peter Medgyes, 'The Non-native teacher' in 2017. Susan was also Chairperson of the Community Council and Community Development Trust. If I mention her in conversation with others who knew Susan, I am reminded that I was a small part of her full and busy life. When sharing memories with teacher trainer Ian Badger, for example, I understood how prolific Susan had been in so many fields.

The very natural way Susan was able to motivate others to share their experience together with her collected experience of writing and publishing over the years gave her the confidence to speak her mind. When she liked something, she made sure everyone knew about it, if she didn't, she had no fear of saying so. This commanded respect, not just from teachers but of the larger publishing houses who consulted her about the publication of many titles. As well as being listened to, she had that rare capability and quality of really listening and understanding.

Fortunately, I experienced this when I explained to Susan an idea I had for a book that I felt would provide a useful teaching resource. Having it turned down by all the publishers I had approached, I'd become despondent and fallen into a long period of procrastination. Hearing this Susan began to weave the same magic on me as she had done for so many others.

She encouraged and guided, listened, read parts during the writing process, inserted a positiveness where there had been procrastination and suggested another publisher, who did like it and made it a part of their teacher development series. There was never doubt about who I would dedicate it to and Susan was an important part of that group.

The last time I saw her, was again at the IATEFL Conference, in Manchester. She was concluding a meeting with a young man I didn't know but heard her tell him "You will do great things young man." Susan was weaving her magic again!

Susan Holden became more than just a dear friend to whom I shall always be grateful but also a mentor, guide and magician. As Susan is no longer around to impart her experience, wisdom and ideas in person you can find many of them in her excellent article "From Ideas to Reality" published by Humanising Language Teaching in April 2019.

Andreas Grundtvig



I cannot express in words how grateful I am for having crossed paths with Susan and how much I learnt from her.

My career led me to meet a truly inspirational woman who somehow will always enlighten my professional as well as my personal life.

Susan, I will always remember your intelligence, your perseverance, your determination, your assertiveness, your energy and your drive. You will always have a special place in my heart, and you will always be a professional reference for me.

Laura Galindo



To know Susan was a true privilege. She was a sharp thinker and a strong woman. Her contagious enthusiasm, strong will, and zest for life were truly inspiring. Though our time together was not extensive, I will always cherish the moments we shared, sipping red wine and discussing whatever, wherever and whenever we crossed paths. Her sharp mind and determination sparked the best discussions and left a profound impact on countless minds in ELT.

Working with Susan on our HLT.digital project was an absolute privilege. Her insight and guidance were invaluable, and her contributions meant a lot to our team. Her unwavering passion for education and remarkable vision will continue to shape our lives and our work. She was an exceptional individual who faced life's challenges with resilience and determination. I wish there was more time for lively, sometimes heated discussions.

Klaudia Bednárová



As a partner in our project, Susan has been a sounding board, a critic and a friend. Her input has been greatly valued by all and her insight and understanding of humanistic approaches has helped move us forward. Her words continue to echo, "Context, context, context. Context is everything". She gave us history and she helped us make difficult and ethical decisions. She ticked us off when we deserved it and she inspired us when we were flagging. She will be missed by all the partners, but never forgotten.



Hearing the news that Susan Holden had just passed away filled me with much sadness. She was such a lovely person who was clever, witty and kind and who has had a far-reaching impact on the world of English language teaching through her exceptional career, dynamism, insights and shared wisdom. Back in 1972, she made her mark by publishing the first iteration of 'Modern English Teacher' with its quarterly issues, which proved so popular that in 1978 the first Selections from MET book (featuring articles from the first four volumes) was published, with the second book being published in 1983. Little did she know, MET was such a groundbreaking magazine it would still be published today, over 50 years later (though now bimonthly). Thanks to her dedication and vision, Susan was also integral to the startup and growth of Modern English Publications Limited, a company founded in the early 70s that laid the foundations for Pavilion ELT at Pavilion Publishing and Media Limited as it stands today.

As Pavilion ELT has grown and strengthened, and indeed during my own career, Susan has been an unwavering support, as well as being a wonderful sounding board and ally to me personally – all things I'm very grateful for. Susan was pleased I was sharing the same ethos as her – to give fledgling authors a chance, to publish more maverick/controversial style books, and to give teachers a voice all around the world. What a legacy she created, and then encouraged me to continue! I don't think there is a single publisher I've worked for where I haven't seen Susan Holden's name on contracts and older documents – having a shared history makes me feel so proud and honoured – but it went far beyond the signatures as Susan was always so willing to share her knowledge and advice, whilst being someone to bounce ideas with. I feel so appreciative that I had the chance to get to know her like I did.

It was an absolute joy to feature on a panel with Susan at the International Language Symposium Brno back in 2017 – we ended up being on it together after there had been a hoo-hah about the number of women versus men on the panel (I'd been the only one with four men) and jointly, succinctly and convincingly we set the world to rights (metaphorically, of course!). We had such a laugh about it that evening, and later still, we were overjoyed to hear our actions and comments afterwards contributed to the creation of EVE (Equal Voices in ELT) – an organisation that promotes equality and fair representation at conferences worldwide.

Typically for Susan, when she came to talk at 'Pavilion ELT Live!' a few years ago, she told me she was going to be "revolutionary, do it without slides" and applauded my efforts in running "a 'different' event that started with a purpose and ended with a forward-looking discussion, and had lots of opportunities for genuine thinking, discussion and getting to know people". I think it's fair to say this experience is not unique ... her passion, knowledge, and unwavering support have enriched the lives of countless individuals within ELT and will remain treasured, and her contributions will continue to influence and inspire educators, authors and publishers in years to come. We're going to miss her greatly.

Kirsten Holt

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