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**Association of Open University Graduates
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As the saying goes, 'time flies' and it is time again for another Newsletter for AOUG members in Europe.

I am very pleased to tell you that once again we have a recipient for Europe for the AOUG Foundation Awards in Regions and Nations. Cameron Werner from Germany has been nominated by Nalini Gohil for completing his degree whilst suffering from trigeminal neuralgia, a debilitating illness which must have caused him great hardship whilst studying and getting his work in on time. Cameron is now studying at Manchester for his Masters, so fortunately, Margaret Stobirski, the AOUG Chairman, has arranged for his award to be presented in Manchester. Our congratulations go to Cameron and best wishes for his further studies.

I also attended the AOUG Foundation for Education Research Awards Ceremony and AOUG Foundation Lecture at The Open University in October which was, as always, a very enjoyable day. At the beginning of the lecture, the computer system decided not to function for the lecturer to show diagrams etc. so whilst it was being rebooted, the lady sitting next to me entertained us with a story about how she was once chased by a hippopotamus and what to do in such a situation. Well, you never know when that will come in handy and it had the audience paying special attention! There is never a dull moment when doing things with AOUG and The Open University, which reminded me of a story my husband told me when we first moved to France. I am sure that you will appreciate its significance, some of you have taken your Open University degree in English, which for you is a second language or have moved into another country and had to learn that country's language just for day to day communication. His story goes like this:

One day two cats were walking along a road having a very good chat, as cats do. Following behind them there was a dog, being very careful to keep his distance. One of the cats looked over its shoulder and noted the dog but continued having a chat with its friend, the dog continued to follow. The cat looked again, but continued to have a chat with its friend. Then, suddenly, this cat turned and shouted, "Woof woof!"

The dog, amazed, turned tail and disappeared into the distance. The cat then turned to its friend and said, " my mother said, you never know when you need another language!." If only my mother had said that to me!

You will see in the latest edition of OMEGA, that the reports from each Region and Nation now have a logo, relevant to each Region and Nation. That did give me quite a dilemma in choosing what would be appropriate for Europe. We have members in eighteen countries and I wanted something which would be acceptable to all and so I ended up with a colourful hot air balloon, hoping that it is an international concept and does not conflict with any individual nation's character. Fortunately these logos can be changed so I would appreciate any ideas you may have on the subject.



For a change in this edition we have contributions from two of our members in Switzerland, Tim Black and Rose Yarom. Tim tells us about the early days for overseas undergraduates at The Open University. It was long before the wonders of emails and all students overseas were very much on their own. How times have changed because unknown to Tim, Rose has written about The Open University examination system for overseas students some years after Tim's experiences. Completely different but, yet again, as Rose comments, the examination system she knew has changed yet again for overseas students of The Open University. We live in a rapidly changing world. Enjoy your read.

Patricia Cowling

The Open University in Switzerland 1984

I started my Open University journey by having the seed planted in Israel; started the very first course in the UK and finally did eight years of study in Switzerland. I was possibly one of the first Open University students in Switzerland, then became one of the first Open University promoters giving talks all over Switzerland and I finished my Open University association by being a counsellor.

It all started on a kibbutz in Israel in January 1983 when a fellow volunteer, Mike, who was a recently qualified teacher, told me that when he stopped working (he was twenty-two at the time) he would go back to university as it would be a fun way to retire. I said I could never do such a thing as I had never been to university Mike said not to worry as I could do the OU. "What's the OU?" I asked. He then explained to me what it was and the seed was planted.

In April 1983 I went to Switzerland to do a one year internship in a hotel in Luzern. I soon found out I was to be used as cheap qualified labour. I decided while working my twelve hour shifts that if I got a degree, I would have a greater choice of jobs. So

in February 1984 aged twenty-one, I found myself back in Barnstaple College where I had been in 1978 doing the face-to-face introduction for my first Open University course. I had thought I would come back to the UK, start my Open University course and get a job. I had been offered a new job in Switzerland but my first year of work had been terrible, but now back in Thatcher's Britain it seemed a better idea. Therefore I asked The Open University if it would be okay for me to carry on my studies in Luzern and The Open University said unofficially yes but I would have to work through my Open University tutor, which would mean there would be no deadline allowance for being in Switzerland and that meant I would have to send my TMAs back a week early to be certain I was on time. I thought I would be in Switzerland only for a year but here I still am in 2015.

For the next eight years, I completed my OU BA Honours by doing one credit a year. This worked fairly well with some mishaps created by being in Switzerland but officially in the UK. The first problem was, always having to take my holidays in the UK at the same time as my examination. This could make going home interesting as in 1987 when there was the 'Great Storm' where winds knocked down trees and twisted metal. I had to wade my way back through the damage to get to my examination. Even trying to take the examination in Switzerland by paying extra did not help. Hull's school in Zurich lost my examination papers and took an hour to find them and then locked me in their school and forgot about me when they had lunch. A week later they put me in a teacher's cubicle in the teacher's room and then forgot to invigilate for half the time. Another time one of my tutors had a breakdown and no-one remembered to tell me so I did not know why my last TMAs had not been returned and found out just before taking the examination.

Yet most of the time things ticked along even though I was all on my own with no one to talk to about my studies as my peers and tutors were all in the UK. I did managed two summer schools and visited my tutors when in the UK but I did feel isolated. My friends supported me so much, that if I said I had to study they did not make a fuss but I could not talk to many of my rugby friends about the topics I was studying.

When I finished my studies in 1992, things had changed and The Open University was slowly becoming available overseas. When I finished my degree in 1992 I offered my services and started as a presenter giving talks to Anglo-Swiss clubs all over Switzerland. It was quite fun but daunting as in those pre-PowerPoint days I had to give talks as a speaker (not presenter) for over two hours. Then I acquired a more official role as an associate counsellor whose responsibility was to follow up on students who had missed handing in TMAs. My job was to find out what had happened and give advice sometimes on how to help people out of The Open University, which could be quite sad.

I parted company with The Open University in 1996 when I went to Reading University to do my MA in TEFL and found while working and writing my dissertation I did not have time to work for The Open University as well. Twenty years later, I am a Swiss state school teacher at secondary 2-level and though I have completed my Masters I still have only spent six months in total at university. I suppose with hindsight I would have liked to have had a normal university experience but I also realise that without my Open University degree my life would have been very different from what it is now and most likely I would have no degree at all. So

now it is possible that when I retire, I will do like my friend Mike said in Israel in 1983 and I might well go back to university and do a course when I am in my 60s.

Tim Black

Recollections of an Open University Invigilator

Having spent fifteen years as an Open University student in Geneva, very often as the only one registered for a particular course, I was surprised and pleased to be approached in June 2006 to act as an invigilator for Switzerland by the Coordinator, Margaret Johnson.

I reported for duty at the examination centre in a well known Geneva hotel near Cornavin railway station, chosen for its accessibility to out-of-town candidates. There I was welcomed by Margaret and my colleagues for the session, who were to guide me through the procedure.

For those of us who have only experienced examinations from the 'receiving end', it is interesting to discover just how much work goes on behind the scenes to make sure students pass smoothly through what is the most nerve-wracking part of The Open University year. For example, packets of examination papers have to be checked for each session against candidates' names. While candidates receive their handbooks before the examination and instructions follow, so do the invigilators. Examination rooms have to be set up and verified before candidates are even allowed in. Inevitably, there are early birds and late comers, as you have no doubt seen yourselves, and with the advent of more and more sophisticated technology, more '*do's* and *don'ts*' have appeared in the handbooks. After the examination is over and candidates leave with a sigh of relief, invigilators have to clear away, pack up the answer books for dispatch, and prepare for the next session.

To my great regret, my term as an invigilator ended in 2010 when the Geneva office and others closed due to cost-effective changes initiated by Milton Keynes. Now European candidates have to travel further afield to take their examinations, or write an end of course assignment or project which, of course, involves no travelling at all.

Needless to say, I enjoyed my time as an invigilator. It gave me the opportunity to prolong The Open University experience as well as to meet some very interesting people. I even had the pleasure of invigilating with my first tutor/counsellor, which added to what was, and still is, an unforgettable part of my life.

Rose R Yarom