

To Elke for her special day

Gordon Tucker

In the gentle warmth of a Finnish summer in 1989, at the 16th International Systemic Conference hosted by Eija Ventola and the University of Helsinki, I first came across a lively young scholar, whose name I learned was Elke.

That encounter, pleasant as it was, might simply have been repeated year after year, in an academic environment, exclusively at international conferences, but happily, there was a very important connection, namely my very good friend, Univ. -Prof. Dr. Erich Steiner and the city of Saarbrücken. I had already been visiting Erich on my trips from Cardiff to Tuscany twice a year and have done so on practically every occasion I have driven to Italy. With Elke studying for her higher degrees with Erich at Universität des Saarlandes, we were to get to know each other away from the conference arena. We also discovered that we both had a love for Italy and things Italian. And so that friendship grew as my visits to Erich and Doris's home continued. Even when she had taken up her chair in Darmstadt, we still managed to meet up in Saarbrücken.

Then, of course, there was a period when Elke and Erich lived in the same building in Saarbrücken's Neugrabenweg. So when she was not around, she always generously offered her apartment to us, especially when there were more than two of us visiting the Steiner household.

And it was in the context of these two adjacent apartments that the most memorable, comical evening and its aftermath that both of us and our respective partners, Peter and Christine, have shared. All I need to do to remind Elke of the event is to utter the word *Ramazotti* (the Italian liqueur, not the Italian singer!). I can still picture Elke's fit of giggling – and she is a giggler! - each time we have recalled that evening. I'll leave the actual story to your imagination.

In the last few years, to my chagrin, our paths have crossed much less. Christian and I no longer make the long three-day drive to Italy and my attendance at Systemic Functional Linguistics conferences has also decreased. But real friends are always friends, despite sometimes long periods of absence.

I would have liked to have been able to complement this personal tribute with a linguistics paper, but I wasn't ready to produce something worthy of celebrating Elke's milestone.

Albeit often from a distance and over many years, I have followed her advancing career, her impressive scholarship and academic achievements. Saarbrücken, its university and your former mentor, Erich, are surely very proud of her.

Dear Elke, I have missed our regular chats, both linguistic and personal and, of course, your lovely fits of giggling. Let us not leave it too long before we meet again. And when, eventually, that special day in the calendar comes along, *penblwydd hapus iawn*, as we say here in Wales!

Dr Gordon Tucker
Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Linguistics
Centre for Language and Communication Research
Cardiff University, UK