

Susan Cunniffe – In Appreciation

*“A good woman is hard to find,
and worth more than diamonds.”*

Proverbs 31:10.

ACCS uncovered a diamond in Susan Cunniffe. Susan served the organisation faithfully through the whole range of Presidents and General Secretaries, from Frank Murray R.I.P. to John Irwin. I first knew Susan during my extended time on the ACCS Executive where she taught me the fundamentals of accounting while supporting me in the role of Treasurer. We then had a short stint working together in the old offices on Nutley Lane while Seán McCann was incapacitated. This was a portent of what was to come. I learned so much more from her about work and life during my 8 year tenure as General Secretary.

Susan would never enter into comparisons of her experience with the range of General Secretaries she worked with. Her loyalty to each and every one of us was total. However, I believe that Susan had a special place in her heart reserved for Frank and this very special relationship set the culture and tone for the organisation that ACCS is today. We all tried to follow the template, succession and retention of this founding spirit became very important to us with Susan there as the living reminder. Susan had an innate sense of the importance of the work of ACCS in providing schools as quickly as possible with the information and support required. Every communication from a school was treated with equal respect and urgency. She had a very special and close relationship with many of our school secretaries built up over the years, she knew where the power lay.

Her attention to detail was legendary, from proof reading the annual Convention handbook, to bulletins, to record keeping and accounts. The archive in ACCS is a testament to her superb work as an administrator and manager. She was ably supported in this by Debbie and so, thankfully, the succession goes on.

Susan pored over the accounts and never were they given more detailed attention than when Malachy was Treasurer.

Searching for that last cent which appeared in the wrong column had to be located and fixed before the lights went out in Centrepoint. We have always been conscious that we needed to make the best use of limited resources and Susan responded to this as per the old adage, “we try harder.”

Susan’s elegant, calm and graceful presence has been a feature of ACCS over many years from which we have all benefitted.





There are probably not many people who have witnessed so much change in an organisation over such a long period as Susan. Susan did not see change as easy. She was very aware of what serious and difficult adjustments such change meant for her working life and relationships. Susan balanced this with the knowledge that change was important for continuing good service to schools and was willing to embrace it because of that. The working life of ACCS has changed beyond recognition for me as I see it on my occasional visits, but as the Chair of a Board I know how important it remains for us at the virtual chalkboard. Thank you, Susan.

The ACCS Convention was the annual culmination of what Susan meant to ACCS and what ACCS meant to Susan. It was the opportunity for those of us in Head Office to let our stakeholders know about our work while opening the doors for further consultation leading to new directions for the year to come. This was all done in a respectful, diligent manner and with Susan at its heart. This was where Susan exemplified her dual role as a team player and a team leader. For Susan the Annual Convention started when the present one finished. Other large organisations employed external companies to organise such events. Susan's intimate knowledge of ACCS needs and her relationships with Board members throughout the country made her the ideal 'company' for ACCS to organise its Convention. I still shudder when I think of the first meeting after Christmas setting the deadlines for reports to be submitted for Convention handbook. Curses on you Seán McCann for setting the bar so high!

Convention was also the opportunity for Susan to meet with all her friends on Boards throughout the country and touch base with them. This contact would energise her for the year ahead. She treated everybody equally, gave them the respect they deserved and had warm relationships with all from cleaning staff to Presidents, and even General Secretaries. There was a certain tipping point at Convention when Susan's organisation and attention to detail meant that things would now flow. This almost always coincided with the President's reception and from that point on it was a signal for Susan to sit back and enjoy, never was a G & T more welcome. It was wonderful and comforting to witness. Convention was the pinnacle of Susan's ACCS year, and to paraphrase Goldsmith, "and still they gazed and still their wonder grew that one small head could carry all she knew."

Susan is still there to lend support to ACCS in her practical, pragmatic way. This is a feature of ACCS, which still maintains contact with and acknowledges the wisdom of those with past experience who are still willing to lend a hand.

Susan's elegant, calm and graceful presence has been a feature of ACCS over many years from which we have all benefitted. We have a lot to be thankful to her for. Go raibh míle maith agat, go n-éirí leat, Susan, is go maire tú céad.

Your eternal friend,

Ciarán Flynn,
Former General Secretary, ACCS.