

Editorial

A MODERN FAIRYTALE!

Once upon a time there was a young librarian who worked in a string of small market towns in Suffolk. One of her readers was a goodlooking shy young man, who occasionally asked her help in obtaining a particular book. Both these young people became engaged to other people. Time passed. One day these two young people came face to face again in the grand new Norwich Central Library; both engagements had just been broken; both wondered why they had wasted their previous opportunities to really get to know each other. Fate had been kind. It was not long before they became Mr. and Mrs. Richard Williamson. Thus the background to my involvement with literature and with the Williamsons!

I first met Henry on my wedding day. He made himself utterly charming to everyone and led us off afterwards blasting a fanfare on a little hunting horn from his car window. A week later he came to stay with us in our first home, a tiny flat in Chichester. I was so nervous I promptly went down with a virulent tonsillitis, which Henry blandly failed to notice.

Over the years I did quite a lot of work for him (as one of many); listening to him read (which was how he 'fixed' the storyline details in his own mind); typing; checking for errors (e.g. of time, place, character etc.): occasionally daring to offer advice; and checking galley proofs. He would enlist several people for such tasks, hoping that between us, *all* mistakes would get spotted.

He stayed with us frequently, and if at a difficult place in the novels, sometimes at length. Our understanding of literary affairs seemed to be a prop to him, although it was almost impossible for Richard to do any writing of his own when Henry was around. However, he met his match in our young son, Brent, a very determined and forceful infant, who could out-talk Henry (and could *not* shut up!) and who, because his love of bonfires was even greater than Henry's (and that is saying something) committed the cardinal sin of poking such fires - a job Henry reserved for himself - and when old enough even daring to actually *light* them ahead of Granpa - which reduced Henry to sitting curled up in the hedge down the lane to get away from him! Bryony, being a gentle babe, tended to gaze in awe from a safe distance.

Nowadays I spend most of each working day dealing with his affairs, concerning either the Society and *Journal*, the Literary Estate or research for the biography.

And all because a shy young man once asked me to find him Richard St. Barbe Baker's *Men of the Trees*, and I silently held out the book I was reading whilst on desk duty. Little did I know how much more we were to have in common!

Anne Williamson