

## **Michelle Sykes**

Michelle: You helped us look at paintings, and understand them;  
You helped us look at ourselves, and understand each other.

It was halos that bonded us – not our own I hasten to say, but occasioned when one of Michelle's students asked her: "What are those yellow balloons behind some of the people's heads?"

"I need your help" said Michelle and arranged for me to lead some sessions on Christian iconography in the course she was teaching. This opening enabled me to draw on – as did so many of her colleagues - her deep knowledge and love of art history. It was always a joy to listen to her and learn. In fact it is an imprint of learning, energy and joy that remains with me from our friendship; an imprint which others have recognised and shared with us today.

In Rewley House days, a group of Fellows would stand in the foyer on College and Guest Nights welcoming everybody in. Sometimes, the start was muted – and then Michelle and Keith would arrive, and laughter flowed. We could relax. Those evenings, with food, wine, conversation and laughter were an important part of Geoffrey's strategy for building the life of the College by cultivating friendships between members of a diverse group of Fellows and students. We had different life experiences and philosophies, a variety of disciplines and sometimes opposing convictions, but out of this, a solid base for a plural community life was created, in what Desmond Tutu later came to call a 'rainbow society' – in miniature.

Michelle became a key figure in this project, giving 'character' to our formation process in the round of College occasions that were part of our bonding. We all owe her a deep debt of gratitude.

Not that she suffered fools gladly. I was preparing for a holiday in Tuscany, and asked if she'd give me five minutes to brush up on Mannerism. "Five minutes! Mannerism in Five minutes" !!!

But she could also be gently patient. At an occasion in your home, Keith, among the guests was a very distinguished Scottish theologian. I was terrified he would expose me – but Michelle was gently protective while teasing out some serious conversation mingled with the laughter.

It has been a joy to hear the family tributes, INCLUDING Lydia's lovely poem, and recognise there the Michelle that we knew – writ large.

The College is now enormous; the Fellowship has grown; and now we must ensure that Michelle's legacy remains – a 'character' legacy of one who helped us all to learn how to bond in our diversity. That is something which must remain integral to the life of this College; indeed of our wider society, through the uncertain times ahead.

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Thank you Michelle, for your wisdom and your love.

*Vincent Strudwick*