

Mr Chancellor,

I begin this citation with a degree of trepidation. When your copy may be critiqued by the redoubtable Monica Doughty, former permanent secretary of The Courier, award-winning student newspaper of the Students' Union of Newcastle University– the stakes are pretty high. For over forty years, Monica's unerring eye detected which of the many students who pitched up to offer their services to The Courier, met her exacting journalistic standards. Dianne Nelmes, the distinguished broadcasting consultant, recalls nervously submitting her first Courier assignment to a rather terrifying lady who looked like Marjorie Proops. (you need to be of a certain age to appreciate that allusion...) When, after a suitable pause, Monica pronounced, "I like you – you can write", she felt a huge sense of relief. I'm hoping that's a feeling I will share when I reach the end of my speech this evening.

Initially appointed as The Courier's part-time secretary, Monica, or "Mon" as she was affectionately known to her team, soon fulfilled many other roles – administrator, manager, lawyer, finance director, advertising sales team and circulation manager, to name but a few. She was also its doughty defender on the all too frequent occasions when it came under fire. One such fracas was when the Union Society, as it was known then, had incurred some heavy losses over a political

campaign and sought to raid The Courier's healthy accounts to balance the books. They had reckoned without the redoubtable Monica and the proposal was roundly defeated.

Whilst Monica did not interfere with editorial decision-making, she was never less than candid if she felt a particular story was misplaced, mistimed, or otherwise ill-conceived. On the rare occasions that her advice was ignored, Monica was invariably proved right. She had the born journalist's nose for what would run, and what would not. Several commentators have observed that had she been born in a different age, Monica Doughty could have had a distinguished editorial career with the national press. Fleet Street's loss was undoubtedly Newcastle University's gain.

Monica's networking skills were legendary. She had a vast array of media contacts and could always be relied upon to whistle up complementary theatre or cinema tickets for reviewers, often at very short notice. She always had an eye for a bargain, both at home and away. Richard Elsy recalls a shared trip to a conference for student journalists in London, noting that Monica was thrilled to have the opportunity to practice her well-honed shopping skills in the metropolis. She also introduced him to "two for one lunches" at BHS. Her formidable negotiating skills ensured that The Courier always had a

sound income from advertisers, which kept the paper healthily in credit at a time when many other student newspapers were running up huge losses. In the days when the newspaper was sold for a fee, she also ran a huge team of sellers whom she motivated with sales targets and monthly awards for top sellers.

Yet for all her tenacity and feistiness in matters of business, there was another side to Monica. Antony Jones, Chair of Convocation, recounts that whilst she would not tolerate drama queens, shoddy work or poor timekeeping, if a student needed support, no matter what the time of day or night, Monica was always there for them. She has been described as “a friend, confessor, mentor and mender of fragile egos.” Such was her care and concern, she sometimes took students home with her, if she felt that was what they needed. She also introduced them to local delights, such as the Lindisfarne Club in Wallsend, where many a convivial evening was to be had with Monica and her late husband Rupert. In a similar vein, Dr Ian Thompson recalls “the warm, chaotic, boozy bonhomie of the Courier office and the frenzy of putting the paper to bed each week - I loved it - it was a home from home for me during my years as a student and Monica was its presiding spirit.” It is a powerful testimony to the enduring affection in which Monica is held, that many former Courier staff still consider her to be a loyal and steadfast friend more than thirty years after they graduated. They also

acknowledge their debt of gratitude to Monica's family for allowing them to share her.

In the current born-digital world, it is hard to envisage the sheer time-consuming slog required to produce the printed edition of *The Courier* in former days. Each week, Monica typed the entire paper as its writers dictated their stories to her at something close to the speed of normal speech. She hammered out the text onto copy paper using her trusty old typewriter, which no one else was allowed to touch. Over the years, numerous attempts were made to upgrade it to something more modern – but she resolutely refused to change it. Dr David Baines, now a senior lecturer in journalism at the University, fondly recalls the weekly bus trips with Monica to the printers, Ramsden Williams. He describes the print shop, with its ancient hot metal plates, creaking old press and cases of monotype, with poster type carved from wooden blocks stacked up in the corners, wryly observing that Gutenberg would have felt right at home there. He and Monica would sit side by side throughout the day waiting for each proof to come off the stone for checking, before sending them back round again for cuts and corrections. I gather that the printers were completely in awe of Monica, as was the owner, Edwin Williams. Every time he tried to increase the print costs, Monica beat them right back down again – she always knew how to drive a hard bargain.

Over the last year, the University Library has digitised every issue of The Courier, right back to the inaugural edition produced on 18th November, 1948. The digital version brings many benefits, - not only does it ensure that the print copies can be preserved for posterity, but the new search interface opens up research possibilities across all sixty eight years of its publishing history. And I can tell you that if you search for Monica Doughty, you will find she is mentioned on at least two hundred occasions between 1972-1998. The entries include witty epithets in the editorial credits – for example, there are references to Monica “where’s the advert?” Doughty and Monica “miracle- worker” Doughty. There is also a lengthy article from May 1998 reporting on her retirement party, which was attended by Courier staff past and present. This special issue includes a lovely quote from Dianne Nelmes, who says of Monica that, “she taught me to be fast and accurate, to be brave and bold, and always to be truthful. She showed me how to spot a real news story and how to sell it, and shared and believed in my dream to be a journalist.”

As you might imagine, someone like Monica was never going to settle for a quiet and cosy retirement. I gather she is an inveterate traveller, who ranges far and wide with her free bus pass, and she still has a razor sharp eye for a retail bargain. She also has an abiding passion for Formula 1 racing and brooks no interruptions when she’s

watching it. A proud mum to Julie and Jonathon she is also a doting grandmother to Libby and Emily, and I'm delighted that all of them are here with us this evening.

Mr Chancellor, for her outstanding commitment to The Courier and to the generations of students who have profited from her professional and pastoral support, I present to you Monica Doughty for the award of an Honorary Fellowship.

Jill Taylor-Roe

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