

**THE EIGHTH IN OUR “TALKING HEADS” SERIES TOOK PLACE ON THE 15TH OF
APRIL 2021**



The Master, Dr. Kathy Seddon introduced the conversationalists for the evening: Court Assistant Professor Karen Jones PhD, MSc, BSc, FRSM, Honorary Professor and Council Member at Bangor University, Director Menter Môn and the Science Park Anglesey, was in conversation with Sue Thomas JP DL, Chairman of Howell's School Governing Board and former Chairman of The Cardiff Bench.

Sue invited Karen to talk about her early life, especially her exploits selling buckets and spades on the Lleyn peninsula when she was ten! Karen responded that she was a child of the swinging sixties born in a small village called Llanbedrog which was heaven. She recalled running along the beach, as a child, sometimes getting painfully sun burned. Karen attended the local primary school and enjoyed the camaraderie of competing in Eisteddfods, both singing and playing the cello. Karen's father was a physics graduate and a teacher but was sadly lost at sea when she was four years old. Karen's mum was a very beautiful paediatric nurse and was left to cope on a widow's pension at the age of 27, with two young children. They were both instilled with a strong work ethic by this wonderful role model. Karen attended Ysgol Glan y Môr secondary school and recalls the headteacher Mr Hughes describing her as an average student. This horrified her and made her work hard at A levels as she believed that education would be a passport to new adventures. Answering an advert in Lady Magazine she found herself as an au pair in New Orleans. The house had a cook, Mary and a butler, Sam who introduced her to their wonderful cuisine and jazz!

Sue asked Karen about her return to the UK, which was unplanned. Karen had a place on a two masted schooner in the Bahamas but her Mum and Step-Dad were in a serious car accident and needed her care. Later she was able to take up a place in Manchester University, graduating with a degree in Medical Microbiology. Sue asked where this led, and Karen explained about the huge unemployment levels at the time

Around five million people had no work, so she was glad to take up a job as a holiday rep. in Ibiza - in spite of having no Spanish. The job was chaotic with double bookings and drunken Glaswegians armed with ghetto blasters at passport control. It was an education.

Sue was interested to hear Karen's next move which was on a scholarship MSc course in physiology in London. This opened the door to work at University College Hospital, at the start of the research into HIV AIDs. Karen helped set up the Terence Higgin's Trust. This was followed by work with a French Pharmaceutical Company bioMérieux working on automated systems - electronic patient records. From this Karen became involved in change management and integrating these automated systems into hospital administration throughout the UK

Malaysia was then discussed, and Karen joked that it was again due to bumping into people in pubs! This particular bar was in Lancashire and the conversation there led to an invitation to join BA SYSTEMS to support their marketing. Karen was asked to go to Malaysia for three weeks to meet the PM's son, who was a clinician, to discuss telemedicine.

This went well, so Karen was asked to join BAE SYSTEMS and became a Director of the International Sales and Marketing Organisation. Karen felt this was a good move as funding was readily available and the work was cutting edge. A percentage of any defence contract had to be delivered back to the customer country over ten years. This was initially a marketing exercise to engage with senior figures in the Country.

The Chairman of the Company, Sir Richard Evans, became a mentor and he had the far-sighted vision of working with education and health care supporting the export of UK education and healthcare to overseas countries. As a result, Karen was invited to join the education training export group led by Baroness Blackstone as a government advisor. This group was looking at how British Industry could use education as a marketing tool. It was a world-wide initiative and looked specifically at tele-medicine which has the starting block to promotions within the company to finally becoming a Vice President of Business Development.

The success in Malaysia led to a project with South Africa. Karen was invited to join the South African Government as an advisor in telemedicine. There she met all the ANC members. Sue then encouraged Karen to share some stories about Minister Zuma who was a paediatrician. Karen helped the minister and was soon her right-hand advisor, accompanying her to the best jazz clubs too! The minister didn't enjoy flying and a crisis landing in Belfast led to a joint raid on the minibar. Karen felt that the strong personal friendship that developed was due to a shared trench mentality – and good evenings at Ronnie Scotts!

Sue then asked about a major change which then took place as Karen left the whirlwind life to have IVF and produce a wonderful son. This brought her back to North Wales so that he could experience the same heavenly childhood that she had enjoyed. Karen now also helps with the family farm and holiday business and was asked to be a council member at Bangor University and a Director of Wales 'first Science Park

What of the future Sue asked, and Karen shared some key goals. She wants to enjoy seeing her son grow up, to support her mum and to read the many book she has acquired on her travels, She is also hoping to play the cello more and to continue her work with Morlais “ –voice of the sea”. This wonderful scheme aims to develop the tidal energy industry in Anglesey Having secured the lease of the seabed from the Crown Estate, Morlais has established a relationship with a number of companies and has sourced funding to support the industry. Over the next 10 years, it is hoped that up to 240MW of green energy will be produced and high-quality jobs created for local people. The £5.6 million consent and development phase of the project has been supported by £28 million from the European Regional Development Fund. It is one of the world's largest community energy projects.

Sue then thanked Karen for a wonderful evening and called on Past Master Geoff Hughes for a vote of thanks.

Geoff thanked Karen and Sue for letting us hear about Karen's fascinating, entertaining, colourful and interesting life. He knew that Karen hoped to help WLCOW in helping others and he picked out the two key elements of her story -education and health – both vital for society. Geoff also mentioned his experience of telemedicine - to treat dangerous prisoners in gaol! Geoff jokingly thanked Sue for being an Excellent “interlocutrix” and asked everyone to raise a glass of thanks to both.



Talking Heads with Professor Karen Jones in conversation with Court Assistant Sue Thomas