

Chapter 7

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

The next year was a very interesting one. Plans for the new school were under way and we all watched with interest to see that the architects took our suggestions seriously as they made their drawings. Those of us in the Grammar School were concerned that we would not lose some of the more academic activities we had, in favour of activities geared more to a general school population. I'm sure the teachers from the other original school were equally concerned that they and their students would not be treated as 'second class'. My responsibility was to represent both groups.

I was invited to join a small group of Physics teachers from other South Wales' schools in a task force, to develop a new curriculum for Advanced level students - those preparing to enter University. We met each week at the University College in Cardiff and would make and test electronic equipment, discuss curriculum and enjoy stimulating conversation. When one realises that 1960, the year I graduated from University, was the year that the transistor was patented, you can understand that we were all electronic 'novices' playing with new toys. It was only fifteen years after my graduation but the science of electronics was already having a major influence, not least in education. Towards the end of the school year I was invited to apply to attend a full-time electronics course at the University, at the end of which I would be granted a Master of Science degree. This was very tempting as I found the subject fascinating and considered that such a course would only augment my teaching skills. I already had the goal of making our school a recognised leader in the teaching of Physics. Further, I had always carried a little regret that I had not accepted one of the two opportunities given me for study towards a doctorate in Physics. At my graduation I had been invited to stay on at Swansea University to do research and, secondly, I had been invited to join a British Geographical Society research team in Antarctica for three years with a 'guaranteed' doctorate afterwards at Oxford University. However, I was a typical Welshman, with the national characteristic of low self esteem, not believing that I was really capable of reaching the doctorate goal. And, I had met Anne - and was in love!

I considered this new opportunity carefully, arranged for another teacher to be available to my school and then applied for a sabbatical leave to further my own education. Mr Price, my headmaster was supportive of my application and it was submitted to the Board of Governors. Our next Board meeting was still two weeks away so I was surprised just a few days later, when I was told by the headmaster that the Board had rejected my application. On further enquiry, I found it was just the chairman who had made the decision without consultation, and so expressed my dissatisfaction to Mr Price. Such actions had been quite common with School Boards who were noted for their lack of empathy with the teachers they employed. This was one of the reasons why the Ministry of Education was insisting that an active teacher be appointed to each Board of Governors. I suspect that the chairman did not realise that the teacher who had applied for sabbatical leave was the same one who sat at the Board meeting! The headmaster told me not to be too dismayed as he had an even better suggestion. "Gareth, I am looking for a Principal for Middle School, and I think you would be the man for that position. It is possible that going away to University now might jeopardize that possibility." Things were getting very interesting ! Decisions were having to be made and I was unsure just what my decisions should be. Should I pressure the Board of Governors to release me for a Masters' degree course ? Should I withdraw that request and trust that the headmaster would follow up on his suggestion ? Did I really want to leave teaching Physics for an administrative position? Coupled with all this was the extra work of developing the Staff Association, its constitution and its relationship with the Board of Governors.

Anne and I talked over the possibilities and prayed without seeing any clear guidelines. Little did we understand that the Lord was already very actively involved in all that was happening. Again, my disappointment at being refused a leave of absence was later to be seen as His appointment to something bigger and better.