



Recording Work Memories: the 60 Voices Project

Interviewee: Michael Le Good

Michael Le Good became a civil servant after nine years in computer programming. Needing a job, Michael spotted an advertisement for statisticians in the government statistical service. Despite knowing next to nothing about statistics, he applied for the job. Upon application, the interview went quite pleasantly, however, he had to tell them that he had no formal training in statistics – just a degree in Mathematics. The interviewer simply said: “Oh well, it’s just another branch of mathematics, isn’t it?” and Michael got the job.

The first post Michael worked in was with a little-known department called the Export Credits Guarantee Department, set up to look after exporters. The department had never had a statistician before, an experience that Michael called “very interesting”. He was subsequently offered a job with the research department of the Central Statistical Office in Whitehall, and later transferred to The Civil Service College, having attended a course there and reaching the conclusion that he could do better than the lecturer due to a lack of rapport with the students. Michael thoroughly enjoyed working with the Treasury, working almost next door to an old chief civil servant. Working in the Treasury gave him the opportunity to join a choir called The Treasury Singers, giving three concerts a year, with occasional recitals. Coming from a working-class family, Michael felt that he had gone quite a long way.

Michael also massively enjoyed his work with the Civil Service College, as he loved lecturing for a group of people who were eager to learn. He even stayed working for the college slightly beyond retirement. He was able to make use of what he learned with computers to prepare lecture notes and to use as demonstrations in lectures.

Noting how keen the students were, Michael has one pleasant memory about a student from Sri Lanka, whom at the end of the course handed him a black model of an elephant and said, “this is what we do for our gurus”, which greatly pleased Michael. Recently, he gave the model elephant away to a friend from Sri Lanka, who has recently just moved into a care home. Also, in the numeracy course that Michael ran during his time working for the college, an elderly clerical officer said she did not see the point of studying “Algae-bra”, meaning algebra. Michael sympathized with the woman, thinking back to his early days when he thought, “Why do we need letters when we have got numbers?”

Michael is a practicing Christian, something his colleagues would know about. He had a particular colleague who would cheerfully swear frequently then say, “Sorry Mike!”. The man couldn’t control his swearing but would always apologise.

Upon starting his statistics career, Michael found out that civil servants at the time did not have a very positive reputation. Upon getting a job within the civil service, he told his wife’s aunt, at

which she was totally horrified, implying that he would be living off the taxpayers, whilst gaining a large pension and going on long holidays. A friend of Michael and his wife had a father who was a senior member of the Civil Service. When going on holiday, the father would say to the children "Don't let anyone know I'm a civil servant". It came as a shock to Michael upon becoming a civil servant that some people did not like them. All he could think was "What would you do without us".

Once retired, Michael took up private coaching. He coached and tutored students doing O-Levels and A-Levels. Some of them were very bright and didn't require very much help, but a few were "so absolutely thick, there was just no way to get through to them."

Post-retirement, Michael has managed to fit in some holidays, jetting across the world. He particularly loves going to France, visiting their numerous times and regularly staying in gîtes. He also particularly enjoyed visiting Germany, South Africa and New Zealand.

Being an active Christian, Michael became quite involved in working for the church, regularly going to coffee mornings organised by the church and also entertaining those at the church. He tries to invite someone every Friday morning, when possible.

Michael also regularly visits his family, who are somewhat scattered across the country. He has a daughter in Scotland, a daughter in Sherborne, Dorset and a son in Southsea, Portsmouth. He had most recently been keeping up to date with his first great granddaughter, aged at two years and nine months at the time of the interview.

Michael has enjoyed his involvement with the CSRF, in which he has enjoyed multiple befrienders across the years. He had a befriender who visited every fortnight and told funny stories about her work in the prison service. Then, the scheme gave him a new buddy who was a woman from a town in Norfolk, which Michael's ancestors from his father's side grew up in. His current befriender buddy is a Russian woman living in Aberdeen with her Scottish husband. Michael's advice for civil servants preparing for retirement is to save as much you can while you can, as once you have retired, you've got your pension but that is it, so use any penny you have got. Furthermore, with retirement comes a lot of time, so Michael recommends to very carefully think and plan about how to use that time.