FORTY (MORE) YEARS ON

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Category: Observations

Every now and then, I step away from writing about mission and such like to share something more personal; this is one of those posts. Eleven years ago, I wrote a post entitled Forty Years On which talked about the events of 1970-71, events which went on to shape much of the rest of my life.

Just over a decade on, I'd like to take another forty year trip back into the past and talk about 1981. In 1971, I was in my first year of secondary school, a mere decade later (though it seemed like an age at the time), I graduated from Bath University with a 2:1 in applied biology specialising in plant sciences.

More importantly, at the end of 1981, Sue and I got engaged. Her love, friendship, support and patience have shaped how the succeeding years have worked out.

While I was in my final year at university, my mam moved out of the house that I'd grown up in and so when I returned "home" after graduation, it was to a place that I'd never lived in and to which I never really felt I belonged. Although I still think of Sunderland as my home town, the sense that my mother's home was also mine, ended in 1981.

Over the summer, I applied for a number of research jobs. I was accepted to study for a PhD at Leeds University, but turned that down when I got a better offer from Southampton (there was a salary, not just a grant with the Southampton post). Oddly enough, I finally earned a PhD from Leeds 38 years later, in an entirely different academic field.

Moving down to Southampton was another pivotal event in our lives. I started attending Above Bar Church, which has been our home and supporting congregation ever since. Sue joined me in Southampton in 1982, after completing a post-graduate qualification in Leeds (strangely enough).

Meeting Sue and moving to Above Bar Church were undoubtedly two of the most important events in my life. I'm immensely grateful to God for what happened in 1981.

If 1970/71 and 1980/81 were particularly important times in my life, the following decades were less marked. By 1991, we were living in the village of Gouabafla, with two children, starting to get to grips with the Kouya New Testament. In 2001, we were back in the Southampton where we expected to stay for a few years before returning to Africa. 2011 saw us in High Wycombe as I worked as CEO for Wycliffe, putting our return to Africa on an indefinite pause and 2021 sees us here in Yorkshire.

Ten years seems a lot shorter than it did back in the 1970s, the decades fly by. However, it is

remarkable to see the changes that can happen in ten years. I've no idea what the next ten years will bring, but I know that God will continue to take care of us.