



'Forrest Gump' Moments – a Blog for CityCare Staff

A book and film character called Forrest Gump is one of my heroes. He unwittingly stumbles into experiences and great moments in his life and has to pinch himself to make sure he was really present in that time and place.

The story I want to tell began on a sunny day in August 1964. A 16-year-old boy, fresh from school, began work in the education department of a large City and started a career in public service which would span six decades and culminate as Chair of a community interest company.

The boy, from a proud working-class background, had known the hardships of growing up in 1950s Britain. However, he came face to face with levels of poverty not encountered in childhood years whilst working as a junior in the school welfare service that provided meals, shoes and essential warm clothing to children. The boy began to understand the reality of deprivation in many of our communities.

The young man's career developed through years of evening classes to gain qualifications for promotion which led to exciting work on urban aid projects and in inner-city communities. Progression followed to head of service, assistant director, corporate director, deputy chief executive with a number of major local authorities, before going on to Chair two community interest companies providing healthcare in Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly and then Nottingham CityCare.

Indeed, my career has taken me to many parts of Europe and the UK and given me many experiences which I could never have expected as a bright-eyed youth from a council estate. The range of services I have managed has ranged from sports and leisure services, parks, museums, youth service, community protection, trading standards, environmental services and adult social care. But meeting the needs of local communities has always been at the heart of what has motivated me.

I am proud to have sponsored many major building projects from community centres to swimming pools; building restoration projects such as Wollaton Hall to joint service centres and community hospitals. I also secured funding and oversaw the building of some landmark projects such as Nottingham Contemporary.

There have been many 'Forrest Gump' moments of attending major international sporting tournaments, 'glittering' entertainment events, climbing the stairs of 10 Downing Street to collect awards for my local authority, meeting famous and inspiring politicians, sports personalities, artists, entertainers, and celebrities. I had the privilege, for example, of hosting her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, at the opening of

the Nottingham Arena, and Prince of Wales, our present King, at the re-opening of a community hospital in Cornwall.

I can truly say, however, that the most inspiring people I have worked with are those 'ordinary' men and women who do exceptional things on a day-to-day basis. The youth worker turning around the life of a young person; the parks gardener creating beautiful flower displays; the social worker and care worker going the extra mile to keep their service user safe; the nurse gently holding the hand and comforting an end-of-life patient; the manager still motivating their team when facing enormous service pressures and, above all, the bravery of staff continuing to deliver services during Covid, the worst pandemic of our generation.

The 'gloss' and 'frillery' of the modern cult of celebrity fades to insignificance against the everyday achievements of these exceptional people, who I have been privileged to work with over the years.

My wife –and age and decrepitude- tell me it is now time to retire. And as I do so, I have two main reflections on working life.

The first is that the challenges of public service are every bit as demanding now as they were when I first came to work. The young man who encountered child poverty, face-to-face in the 1960s, is now seeing greater demand for food banks than ever before with energy costs and affordable housing beyond the reach of so many.

The second is that of all the things that I have done and achieved, the best and most successful have been through the work of teams. You get more out than you put in when working as a team– and a big thank you to all the colleagues I have worked with over the years. You have supported and inspired me.

Chairing Nottingham CityCare has given me the greatest pleasure. From the start, I have been humbled by the care and dedication of the staff of the organisation and their commitment to Nottingham's communities. I know this commitment is shared by my colleagues on the Board and by Sherry Malik, the incoming chair, who will work with you to take the organisation forward.

I wish you all well for the future. You are CityCare. You all hold the future in your hands and that is a safe place. It has been a privilege to work with you.

Michael