

THROUGH THE EYES OF A TEACHER

ANDREA LUXTON'S WORLDVIEW

From her office in the Department of Education at the headquarters of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Dr. Andrea Luxton can be forgiven for glancing at her watch frequently. It's not that this Andrews University alum is anxious for her workday to end. As one friend quipped, "She wouldn't know what to do with a 9-5 job. She'd start ticking the 'employed part-time' box on surveys."

When Luxton checks the time, she's not keeping company with the White Rabbit who discovers, "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date." Years of marching to the dictates of school bells have made punctuality a strong point. Luxton's timepiece testing is more about trying to reset her body clock. This world traveler changes time zones with a dizzying frequency that would have most of us reaching for our Dramamine. It's one of the occupational challenges that comes with being Associate Director of Education, and Executive Secretary for the Adventist Accrediting Association.

Multimedia students looking for an entertaining video project would do well to consider Luxton as a subject. Her career track begs a parody of the children's show, "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?" Friends who try to keep up with Luxton, even by phone or email, are used to her voice reaching them from Nigeria or Iceland, New York or Ireland. A partial list of the countries on her itinerary since her move to Washington, D.C. in 2003, sounds like the lineup for the opening ceremonies of the

Olympic games: Australia, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Figi, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Norway, Papau New Guinea, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. In July, Luxton will be adjusting her watch again—this time to Mountain Time. That's when she will assume the presidency of Canadian University College in Alberta.

"I'll miss the travel," Luxton admits, "but it will be good to develop more of a sense of home, to put down roots." I suggest to her that she could be poster child for the admonition, "Bloom where you're planted." She corrects me, with just a hint of her British accent still audible. "In my case it would be 'Bloom where you're transplanted.'" Her voice gets more serious as she admits, "Living out of a suitcase takes its toll. But nothing is so broadening as travel," she quickly adds. "Meeting people where they are, where their challenges are, makes such a difference." She is pensive for a moment. "I always knew I'd

find my way back to a college campus, though," she concedes. "Teaching is in my blood. I see everything through the eyes of a teacher."

Born in Watford, Hertfordshire, about twenty miles northwest of London, Luxton was raised by parents who were both educators. By age four she knew she would one day join their ranks. "I sat on the floor in the evenings while my mother wrote lesson plans and my father cor-

rected math and science homework," Luxton recalls. "Feeling left out, I would get up and fetch a large tin of buttons my mother kept. I would pry it open and busy myself creating my own classrooms and populating them with 'students.' I would lecture to them for a while, and then shift them from place to place, simulating the movement from room to room through the school day. Perhaps that sorting and shifting was an omen," Luxton adds with amusement. "In addition to teaching, I was clearly destined to be an administrator."

Luxton's introduction to her own real students occurred rather early. She was asked to teach several classes of English as a Second Language while still a



Whale-watching in Alaska

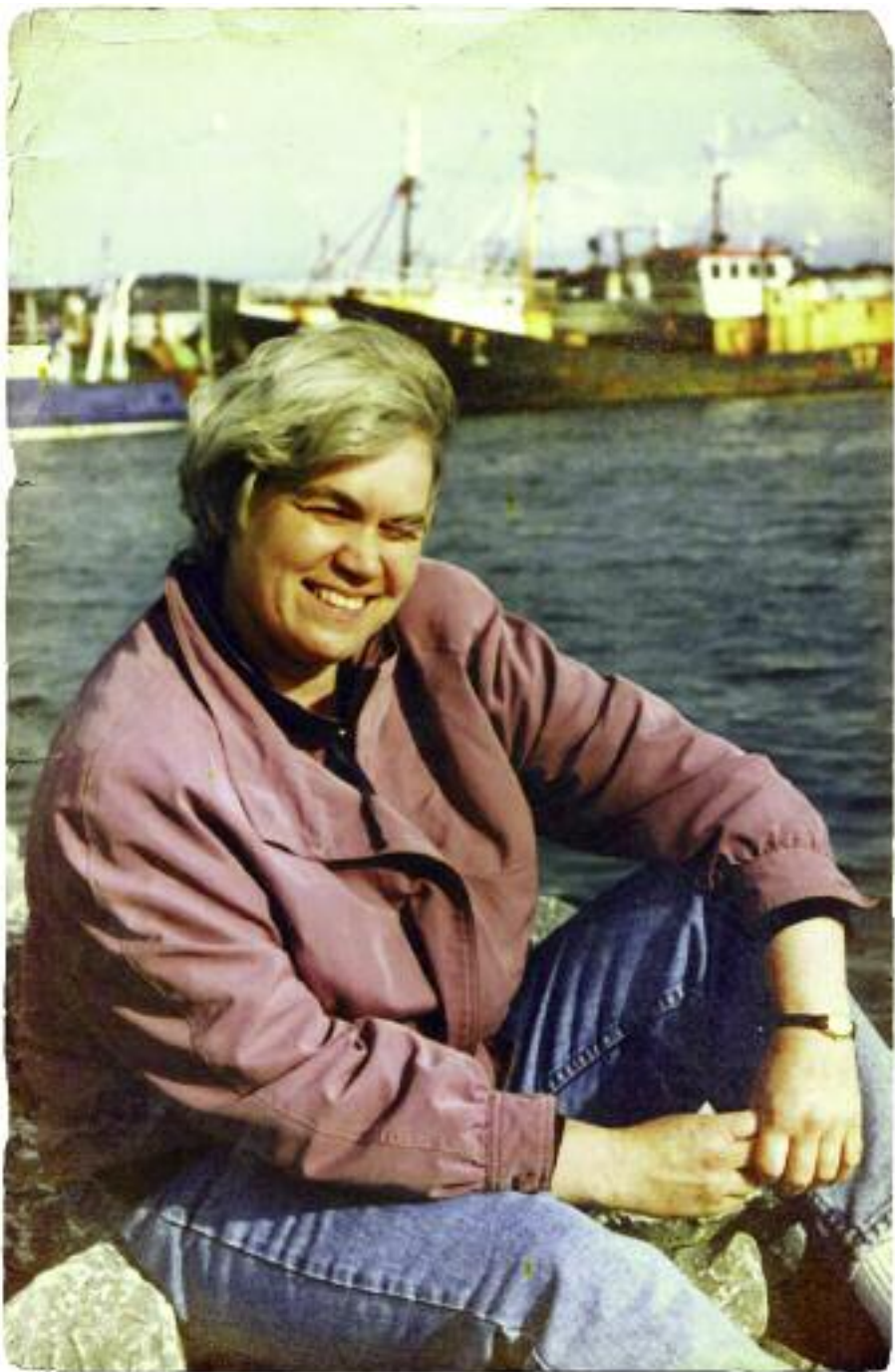
student at Newbold College, where she majored in English and theology. She also taught in the Newbold Primary School. Because she had earned a gold medal in Speech and Drama from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, she was well-sought-after as a speech tutor. She gained a reputation, as had her mother before her, for working tirelessly with her students to prepare them for competition and external examination.

Luxton also worked for a year in Nigeria, teaching both the children of missionary families and adult students seeking entry to university. Upon completing her MA, she taught speech, English, and girls' physical education at Stanborough School. She left that position to pursue doctoral studies, and then returned to Newbold College as English Department head and senior lecturer. She served next as Principal of Stanborough School. During much of that tenure, she also wore the mantles of Education Director for the British Union of Seventh-day Adventists, and Women's Ministries Coordinator. Her final posting in the United Kingdom, before accepting calls to North America, was as President of Newbold College, a position she held for four years.

As she looks back on her early teaching days, Luxton recalls that they were not without challenges. "I remember one particularly disastrous French class," Luxton admits. "It was a class of 'repeaters'—students who had failed an earlier attempt at French. The class contained almost thirty students and most of them were twelve- and thirteen-year-old boys. They came in hating the subject, and I was charged with moving them at least to manageable loathing. Our one triumph came when we decided to make a French meal together. That marked a bit of a turning point. But it wasn't sufficient to tempt me away from my love of my native language and favorite subject—English."

From her days as senior lecturer and Chair of the English Department at Newbold College, one class stands out in Luxton's memory. "I'll never forget my first class in A Survey of English Literature," Luxton offers. "That particu-

lar class was unusually large—about forty-seven students, I reckon." Luxton describes that class as "an odd mix." She explains, "I had a strong contingent of high-achiever American transfer students bent on earning their A's. They would race back to my office after the bell, and would be waiting there to continue our discussions when I arrived. The other half of the class were, how shall I say, 'less enthusiastic?' They were typified by one particular business major who could be counted on at least once a week to raise his hand and ask, 'And so why does this



matter?' I trust I finally convinced him of the importance of literature," Luxton concludes. "He's now a senior member of Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA). I like to think that his education in the humanities is enriching his organization's humanitarian endeavors."

In addition to an MA in English literature earned from Andrews in 1978, Luxton's advanced study includes a PhD from Catholic University of America in 1986. Her dissertation involves intertextual study of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. She considers herself very fortunate to have been able to pursue her two academic passions, English and theology, at the doctoral level. "If I ever had the luxury of going back to school, those are the areas I'd like to pursue further," she says. "I'd like to do more work in Old Testament studies, particularly Hebrew poetry."

Luxton's leanings aren't all toward the literary, however. In 1999, she completed a postgraduate diploma in Institutional Management and Change in Higher Education from the University of Twente, Netherlands. "I love a good puzzle," she says. "I like a challenge that involves analysis and strategy. And if people are part of the mix, which they always are in education, that's even more exciting," she claims.

Another area of study that Luxton would like to pursue is psychology and counseling.

"The workings of the human mind fascinate me," Luxton admits. "My job brings me into contact with a wide range of temperaments and personalities," Luxton explains. "My students now, for the most part, are teachers and fellow administrators. I direct seminars in the integration of faith and learning. I also offer seminars on management, quality assurance, and educational strategy. Earlier this year, for example, I worked with a large contingent in West Central Africa. The previous year I worked in East Africa. I helped church administrators who are transitioning to educational administration, or who are broadening their responsibilities to include that portfolio. I also helped to train university-board members. We worked together to expand their understanding of leadership and ethics, professional perimeters, and related management issues."

To sum up Luxton's values and aesthetics, it's helpful to have a look around her condominium in Laurel, Md. You won't find many mementos from her travels. Luxton prefers memories to memorabilia. Her walls aren't lined with books. More and more of those are given away with each move. Clearly Luxton prefers "space" to "stuff." Friends who vacation with her see this preference in action. One of Luxton's favorite activities while on holi-



Opposite: Dingle Harbor, Ireland

Above: Land's End, Alaska

day is "mushrooming." It has nothing to do with foraging for supper. Rather, "Sister Andrea" as some closest to her have dubbed her, likes nothing better than to plant herself on a rock, or some similar vantage point overlooking the ocean. "I just find it rejuvenating to sit there and absorb the sea and sky and listen to the rhythm of the waves," she says. "Oddly, it can be quite a creative exercise as well. Sometimes in that situation an idea will just come to me—and I wasn't even consciously trying to come up with one."

Back in her condominium, the astute observer will notice several well-placed objects. Luxton modestly indulges one bit of collecting. She is fond of art glass, and particularly glass globe paperweights. "I like ones in blue best," she admits. "And I prefer those with abstract designs rather than those with imbedded objects such as flowers."

When asked why these objects appeal to her, Luxton does not hesitate to answer. "It's important in our hectic lives to make room for art," she insists. "Sometimes just beholding something beautiful for a few minutes can help to center you, to restore your soul." I concur that the soul needs kick-starting some days. "I like these glass art objects because they're solid and substantial, yet whimsical and imaginative," Luxton continues. They also testify to much practice and refining."

"They sound like their owner," I suggest. Luxton is silent. Then I hear a soft chuckle. I take that as confirmation.

Beverly Matiko (BA '77, MA '78) is an associate professor at Andrews University and teaches classes in English, Communication, and Honors. She enjoys playing piano for a Sabbath school class of three-year-olds, serving a table of twelve with her Portmeirion dishes, writing all her Christmas letters by hand, and keeping fresh flowers in the house.