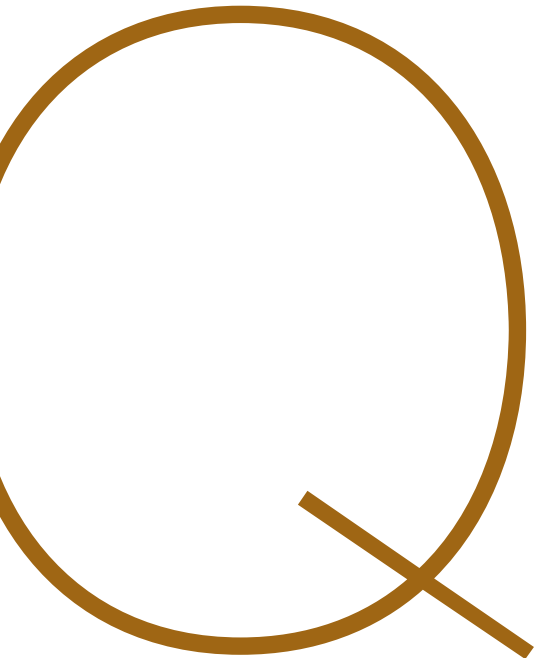




# ANDREA LUXTON

Since stepping into the role of provost in August 2010, Andrea Luxton has experienced, welcomed and analyzed the challenges, quirks and strengths of Andrews University. Her conversation with **Meredith Jones Gray** introduces her perspective and her goals for building community and continuing the tradition of excellence at Andrews.



**You're not a stranger to Andrews University. Can you tell us a little bit about your history with Andrews University?**

I've been here twice. Once as a graduate student—I did my MA in English here in 1977 to '78. Then I came back and did an exchange quarter (when Andrews was on the quarter system); I exchanged with Doug Jones [current chair of the Department of English] and came over from Newbold College and taught here for a quarter.

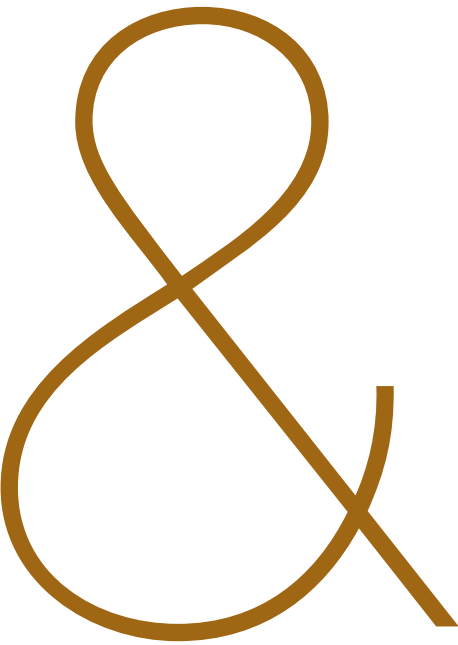
**What were those experiences like for you?**

Oh, they were excellent. My first—when I was in my MA— that was my first time in the United States. That was a little bit of culture

shock for a Brit, but it was a very friendly department and got on well. That really, I think, was the beginning of my seeing bigger opportunities. Up until then I had planned on being a secondary teacher, and I still went back and did that, but then I had the connections and the encouragement to go and do other things later, to go on and do my PhD. That was a really important part of my life, changed my direction quite a bit. Some of my teachers were Edith Stone, John Waller, Delmer Davis—it was his first year teaching at Andrews—and Merlene Ogden.

**What made you take the plunge to come to Andrews back then as a graduate student?**

I graduated with my first degree from Newbold in theology and English. I had



thought about being a pastor, but at that time there were not a lot of openings for women in ministry, and so the strong advice of the teachers there, including the theology teachers, was that if I wanted to work for the church, I should look at shifting into teaching. English was my other degree, so I was looking at English. I knew that I needed to go on and get a master's degree if I was going to continue into teaching, especially in the American system. A lot of other people from England were going to Andrews, going to the Seminary, but no one else had gone into English. The church in the UK had only ever sponsored men and they'd only ever sponsored people for theology. So it took them a long while and a little bit of competition before they agreed to give me at least a little bit of help to come over.

**So what have you been doing since then that brought you all the way from being a graduate student in English and an English teacher to the position of provost?**

After being a graduate student I taught in secondary school for four years. I really, really liked it, but again there weren't a lot of opportunities in the UK in the church system beyond the one school where I was. So that's when I decided to go on, with some encouragement, and do a PhD. After I completed my degree in Washington, D.C. at Catholic University of America, I went back to Newbold College and became head of the English Department. Then there was a combination of things: I worked between Newbold College and the British Union. I

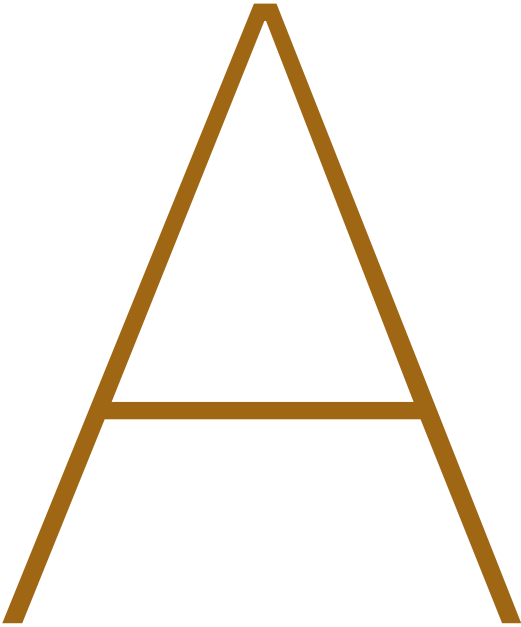
worked in the Union office as Education Director and Sabbath School Director. I was head of the secondary school—Stanborough School—for a while. Then I went back as principal at Newbold. After that I went to Canada, to Canadian University College (CaUC), as academic vice president. From there to the General Conference as associate education director where I was responsible for five divisions. That was a lot of world travel. Then back to CaUC as president and then here. That's just a snapshot!

**What about your experiences at all those various places and positions do you think has prepared you for what you're doing here now at Andrews University?**

Well, all of them have impacted me in different ways. Newbold College was very international; that was one of the rich parts of that community. That's something that, when I left Newbold, I missed. When I worked for the General Conference I got that a bit again when I traveled. So those parts of my experience really helped me understand and respond to diversity and internationalism.

Between all of the institutions, I have worked with the British system, the Canadian system, and the U.S. system, so I have a little bit of familiarity with different types of accreditation and different types of government systems. That is helpful because you learn what lies behind some of the structures of the way higher education works. It helps you when you go into a new environment because you can begin to see some of the issues, challenges and strengths.

In my job in Washington I was constantly in different institutions of higher education around the world. With leading accreditation teams you had to go in and appraise the



# "I'M ALWAYS A TEACHER AT HEART."

situation in a short amount of time and then make suggestions. So that, I think, has helped the way I think about issues and problems.

But I'm always a teacher at heart, so I love the classroom and I love the academic environment, the students and teachers, and working with that community. I think that's one of the reasons that at the times I was not in an academic institution I chose to move back whenever I had the opportunity.

**If you could teach a class, what would it be?**

Oh, well, my area is Milton, so of course I would love teaching Milton. I really like all of the Renaissance period, so anything in that area. But one of my favorite classes was communication skills. I like the public speaking aspect and dealing with freshmen and just helping them find that they have more voice than they thought they had.

**You've been on campus for about six months now, and of course we're always curious about how any new member of the team finds our community and feels about the atmosphere she or he meets at Andrews. So what is good so far about being here?**

Everyone has been very welcoming. I have felt appreciated, and I have felt that people want me to be part of the team. That's very positive. And, again, I like the mix of people on the Andrews campus and the community that that brings.

**What about the Andrews culture is going to take some getting used to?**

I think I've largely been in institutions that, just because they were smaller, allowed change to happen more quickly. One institution I went into, I remember the board chair saying to me, "The ship is heading for the rocks. Can you turn the ship before it hits the rocks?" But the reality was it was a small

ship. When you talk about Andrews it's more like a huge cruise liner. It takes way longer to turn the ship. I think that's one of the things that is more challenging at Andrews.

And with that, there's a huge amount of history. That can be really, really positive but it also makes it difficult sometimes for people or the institution to keep up with what is happening in the wider environment, which expects things to shift or change. It's hard if a place isn't used to that or if it's too deeply ingrained in tradition, even though that tradition is good.

The same thing is true of diversity. It brings huge richness, but it also makes a community more complex. Other dynamics are constantly part of the mix when a community is more diverse and you have people from different countries. Even for myself—I've been in North America for a fair number of years, but even now I can say something and people will look at me like, "What does that mean?"

### **Do you find people reacting to your accent?**

Yes, I do a little bit. Mostly they say it's very clear. And that's just British pronunciation, so that's something I can take absolutely no credit for!

### **As you become better acquainted with Andrews, what strengths do you find here that you think we can build on?**

First of all, again, the richness of the mix of people who are here. It's very unusual to find that in one place; that is quite exceptional. Secondly, the level of commitment. There's a huge amount of commitment on the campus, whether people have been here multiple years or a few years. Lots of people go the second or third mile, more than they have to, to make a situation work, to be involved in things beyond the classroom, to connect with students, to connect with the wider community. That's very visible, but it's more than that. You sit in a room and you get that instinct that you'd better not say anything bad about Andrews or you might not survive for very long!

Another strength is extremely capable people. I think Andrews has done an excellent job of pulling very capable faculty from around the world. That's a huge strength to be built on. I think the campus itself is really beautiful, a very good environment in which to have a university. And now going back on the positive aspect of tradition—the history of the university means that, within the

Adventist Church, the world looks to Andrews and has great respect for it. They feel that Andrews has that strength and stability that they want to be part of. Andrews is really far more than the on-campus Andrews.

### **Can you give a nutshell description of what your responsibilities are as provost at Andrews?**

Well, I'm responsible for anything that connects to anything academic on campus—so, the academic programs, faculty, assessment and all of those types of things. Information Technology Services and Student Life, Marketing and Enrollment report to me. Most of what actually happens on campus becomes my responsibility, except for anything that is financial (i.e. Advancement, Human Resources). That doesn't fall to me. I am the second officer of the university, so technically speaking I am responsible when the president is away. Then I can call snow days!

### **You arrived at Andrews at a critical moment in our academic history with the recent decision to partner with Griggs University. Tell us a little bit about how that timing has affected your work load these first few months.**

It has probably not quite doubled, but it has substantially added to my workload. But I have had help, fortunately. For me the challenge was that I was coming new to the institution and didn't know it that well from the inside. And then to help that kind of change happen—bring another university onto the campus—has made it very complex. So that has been the biggest part of the challenge.

### **Can you explain what kinds of issues you've been wrestling with in this process of uniting the two institutions?**

The student systems—the way that we record and give out information—are totally different. That goes right through a number of different levels into computer operations and so on. The policies by which the two institutions work are vastly different. The accrediting bodies are different—Griggs is distance education and affiliations; Andrews is on-campus plus also has some affiliations. So those processes are very different as well. Added to that you're dealing with a situation in which you have a geographic move for Griggs. So how do we continue the institutional knowledge and history and keep

it as seamless as possible for the students who are on the receiving end?

### **That sounds like a huge challenge. What other challenges do you see facing us at Andrews?**

The expectations for accreditation are so changed. As Andrews has grown, departments have developed and they've developed their own systems and ways of doing things, but those are not necessarily replicated somewhere else. So there has been a lot of individuality, which is good because that gives people a feeling of ownership. But with the way bureaucracy has changed things, with the accreditation expectations now, including for our affiliations, just the management of some or all of the paperwork and processes demands that some things have to have a more centralized management—management versus control. We still have to encourage people to be creative in their own areas, but somebody needs to be a "watchdog" to help them make sure that we are in compliance with the massive amount of expectations that are out there now from different groups. How do we maintain the entrepreneurial and independent spirit that Andrews has, and rightly should be proud of, and balance that with the increasing amount of legislation that is out there? Somebody needs to be managing all that in a holistic way.

Another thing we need to recognize is that the types of pressures on budgets in higher education now are different from what they used to be. Within the Adventist sector we are getting pull-backs on the amount of money we get to support the institution, so we're required to be a little bit more self-sufficient. With all these external expectations and administrative issues, the ability to operate efficiently and support the academic environment is now looking very different to how it used to look. You also have the pressures of the economy, which means that students don't have as much money in their pockets. There's a need to give more grants and scholarships to help them and also to be competitive in a very competitive marketplace. You put all those things together, and it puts huge pressure on budgets.

Back to the cruise liner image—when you've been around as long as Andrews has been around, you develop as time develops. You grow and add a bit here and there. It's hard sometimes to step back and say, hey, we're now here—how do we adjust what we are to absolutely set ourselves to be successful in the future and not constantly





through different times of turmoil in the country, tracing a child's life through to young adulthood and the different hopes and dreams and tensions. And I read an Alexander McCall Smith book recently; that was my light reading.

**You have what I think is an advantage—of being an administrator at Andrews and also being a mentor to a couple of Andrews undergraduates. You didn't come to Andrews alone. Can you tell us a little bit about your household?**

I have living with me my nephew and my cousin. They are both Andrews students, one in the first year and one in the second year. One is studying architecture and one is studying music and English. When you go through registration with a student yourself, you know what works and what doesn't work and that really helps you understand what's going on. You get a very real insight into student life, and that's very good. I suppose it also keeps me young. My house may be messier but my life is a lot more interesting!

**What do you wish for all of the students of Andrews University?**

Back to community again—finding a community where they feel safe enough to maximize their potential in every possible way. There is an image that is important to me; I really like the banquet image. In the Bible, time and time again Jesus talks about the banquet. The banquet to me is not just a food thing—much as I like food! It's about experiencing the wholeness of everything. Enjoying it and reveling in it just because it's beautiful and tastes wonderful. From an imagistic point of view, I would like the students at Andrews to experience the banquet—spiritually, academically, in personal relationships, the whole thing. A bit of fruit, a bit of chocolate cake! I would want someone to go away saying, that was a good place to be! My own experience at Andrews was that in many ways. It opened up opportunities in my own mind. I grew in many different ways, and I'd like the students at Andrews to experience the same. ■

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Meredith Jones Gray (BA '76, MA '77) is professor of English and Andrews University campus historian. She is currently researching and writing the second volume in the Andrews Heritage Series.

be fighting to find every penny to operate? If we're doing that we don't have the flexibility to change with opportunities. We somehow have to find a way, in the way we set up our budgets and look to the future, to allow ourselves to do that. Then we'll be a much more vibrant community.

And that's an ongoing, structural discussion. What is the ideal picture for Andrews—a mix of numbers and students and programs—and what is the budget that would support that? We need to create that kind of a picture and then ask, How do we get there? Recognizing that we're not just dealing with building blocks that you can shift around, but with history and people and strong feelings and commitments. That's an interesting challenge.

**You've outlined very clearly the complexity of your role as provost and the challenges you are facing. If you could concentrate on one particular thing, if you could pour yourself into a pet project that you would really enjoy working on and developing, what would that be and what would you do?**

The thing I love more than anything is building community. I realize that's a bit amorphous. How do you have a project about building community? But I think it's about ownership; it's about people being excited about where they are, wanting to be where they are and feeling supported. That's easy in good times but not so easy when things are harder, although I think it's still possible. If I have one passion, that's it—how to build community. This sounds very strange but I actually get

quite excited with structures, which is a less human side of this project. It's just simple things sometimes, but to be able to look at about forty or fifty committees (this sounds so boring!) and think about what they actually do, work out what duplications there are or where there are holes, and build a structure that allows something to move through the structure. That's really good to see. People get quite excited about that themselves. When I talk about community it's trying to enable the maximum amount of people to have a positive voice in what is happening.

I think my creativity is more in this kind of thing—problem-solving. I wish I could sit down at a piano and play, or I could write creatively, but that's not what I do. I have to look at some structures and play around with them!

**Let's go to some more fun stuff. I don't know any English teacher who doesn't like to read. What do you read when you get to choose your reading material?**

A wide range of books! I have a competition on with a Finnish friend who lives in the UK, which is about 400 books long. It's largely world literature, very diverse—Nobel prize-winners for world literature, a hundred African texts, quite a wide range of world literature. For me literature gives me a greater awareness of the world, of others, of people.

**What are one or two of the best things you've read lately?**

An African book called *Abyssinian Chronicles* [Moses Isegawa]. It is set in Uganda,