**Rosemary (Humanist)**

**MY STORY**

Mine is a story about a journey...about how I came to call myself a Humanist, and what that word means to me.

My life journey started in the NE suburbs of London, with a loving family, a friendly church and a very laid-back school.

Aged 11 I found myself in a boarding school a long way away from home. The school was a mass of rules and conventions. Life was totally changed. Like being on shifting sands, out of your depth, trying to find a way in the dark...

It was a C of E school - exams mattered, but religion mattered a lot more. I struggled along... loved the family visits to France in the holidays. But that raised all sorts of questions. Supposing I'd been born into a French family, instead of a British one, life would have been very different. School would have been different...History??? I'd have wanted the French side to win the battles, not the English side. I'd have been a Roman Catholic, and believed a different version of Christianity...what was me? my views? and how much was decided by other people?

I grew up, left school and moved on, still pondering these questions, still determined to be a Christian - most of my friends were Christians too, some nominally, some enthusiastically. I spent the next fifteen or twenty years discovering that it was all a lot less clear-cut than the school narrative had led me to believe. There were good and bad, selfish and unselfish in any faith, in any nation, wherever you looked.

What about ideas? I discovered a lot depended on whether you asked open or closed questions. In my school and church questions were usually 'closed', for example "We believe x. Now what are the reasons for believing x?" This type of question tells you what the answer is going to be, before you look at reasons. An open question would be " Is x true?" or " What does x mean?" It is an invitation to explore a topic, leaving open what conclusion the people in the discussion will come to. I asked myself a lot of questions. Open questions. I started to look for evidence. Eventually, by then aged about 40, I felt it was time for some conclusions.

I didn't see any evidence of the existence of any gods or spirits.

From my perspective it seemed highly probable that human beings are wholly part of the natural universe.

Most important seemed to be that all human beings treat each other with respect - not as rivals, objects to be used or pushed out of the way, if necessary with weapons, armies, force and violence of all kinds.

I came to the conclusion that the basis of right and wrong (morality) is to treat other human beings as you wish to be treated and discovered that this idea can be found in many different faith and belief systems.

Those were my 'conclusions'. A little while later I learnt of the Humanist associations, and discovered that many people thought as I did. For the last thirty or forty years it has felt easier for me to make sense of the world and of life. That doesn't mean I like or approve of what I see, but I don't have an inner conflict.

Focussing on what we hold in common, while reflecting our differences seems to me a good basis for life, enabling us to work together for the common good.