

An interview with Dame Evelyn Dick

In this series of *Way of the World* reports, I will be interviewing some of this country's leading cultural figures. First, I've come to the county of Rutland to visit one of Britain's most progressive education institutions. Starting out as Uppingham Infant School, it became Uppingham Academy, then Rutland Technical College, and is now Rutland Idle University. I'm meeting its Vice-Chancellor, Professor Evelyn Dick.

ED: Professor Dame Evelyn Dick, actually.

PS: I stand corrected, Dame Evelyn. Now I first wanted to ask about the university's name. Why Idle?

ED: In the tradition of such venerable UK universities as Liverpool John Moores, Anglia Ruskin, Oxford Brookes and Bath Spa, we are named after a local hero, the Monty Pythonian and popular historian Eric Idle, who put Rutland on the map with his group The Rutles. I am incredibly proud and humbled to be playing my part in our beautiful county, my true home.

PS: So you are a Rutlander, born and bred.

ED: Not as such. I grew up in Cheltenham, actually. But here at RIU we we believe in personal truth, not the tyranny of facts. I feel myself a Rutlander, and that's all that matters.

PS: Let me ask about your background. It's in commerce rather than academia. But all the companies you've led - British Home Stores, Royal Bank of Scotland, Debenhams, Top Shop - have collapsed during your tenure. Do you feel any responsibility?

ED: Of course not. My achievements have been constantly undermined by discrimination and victim shaming, ever since the start of my career, as a lowly stable hand.

PS: Your earliest job was in a stables?

ED: Yes. I worked with the team maintaining my father's string of polo ponies. But even back then I suffered the most distressing verbal and mental abuse in the dressage room. I'm taking my father to an employment tribunal, actually, for what happened thirty years ago.

PS: Oh, that's truly shocking. Were you called the B- word? Or the F- word? Or the L- word?

ED: The L- word? You mean L*****?

PS: I was thinking of L***.

ED: Oh. Well, to be honest I can't recall the actual words used - but that just proves how traumatic the experience was for me;

my brain has suppressed the memory. I overcame this adversity only thanks to the support of my partner - and our good friend who's now the Prime Minister.

PS: Ah yes, your partner. Lord...

ED: Lord Evelyn Dick, Head of Rutland Weekend Television. A company founded by the heroic Eric Idle himself.

PS: So you're both called Evelyn. That's rather a coincidence?

ED: Not at all. We both changed our names by deed poll last month. Evelyn is the only English Chris... I mean forename which escapes the tyranny of dimorphic gender nominalism - it can be used by both... all sexes. We took this brave decision to demonstrate our solidarity with the LBGTQIAC++ community of gender activists and programmers. In fact, I now require my Senior Management Team to voluntarily follow my example.

PS: Sorry - you mean all your staff are now called Evelyn?

ED: Of course not. That would be confusing. They can use homophones: Frances/Francis, Lesley/Leslie, etc. I foster an inclusive, diverse and egalitarian community here at RIU, totally committed to free speech - of the correct sort, of course.

PS: Returning to academic matters: I read that Edinburgh University is now paying students to review the teaching material developed by lecturers, to eliminate any colonial, racial, misogynist and offensive references, or to preface them with trigger warnings. Are you doing anything similar at RIU?

ED: There's no need. Our students write the course materials themselves. They are best placed to decide what they want to learn. Also, it enables us to cut out the middle man. I mean intersectional person.

PS: You're referring to...?

ED: The lecturers. They are the biggest drain on a university's resources. Confusing and disturbing the students' minds with their ideas, and then going on strike for higher pay. We can better use our income from student fees to reward my Senior Management Team and myself. We do employ as professors emeritus a number of experts of the correct ethnicity and gender - BBC presenters and the like. They generate the news stories which place RIU at the forefront of UK research. We call them Idle Scholars. They're on zero-hours contracts, of course, to save money.

PS: Talking of money, I believe you're the highest-paid VC in the country - at one of the smallest universities.

ED: Am I? But I'm paid only a fraction of the earnings of comparable white male executives like Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg: it's blatant unfairness, and very hurtful

of you to suggest otherwise. My annual salary increase is decided by a totally independent Remuneration Committee which I chair. Good day to you.

PS: Well, thank you very much for your time, Dame Evelyn.

ED: Professor Dame Evelyn. You've had twenty minutes - that'll be £500. Pay my accountant on your way out.