

REMEMBERING ROSS ECKLER

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As a 10-14 year old, I was keen on mathematical puzzles – I knew of Dudeney and Lloyd – nothing too clever or sophisticated, though. A year or two later, I was getting into cryptic crossword puzzles. And when I was 15-16, I won several cryptic crossword clue-writing competitions in a national newspaper. Occasionally, I'd even check out Martin Gardner's mathematical puzzles section in *Scientific American*. Then one day in 1967, I read Martin Gardner's review of Dmitri Borgmann's *Beyond Language*. I was sufficiently intrigued by the examples that Gardner offered from the book that I bought both *Beyond Language* and Borgmann's first book from two years earlier, *Language on Vacation*. The books hadn't been published in England, so it was quite a task to contact the US publisher and to purchase copies of the two books. (A trivial task now with the internet!)

I couldn't believe the wonders offered by Borgmann's books. *Language on Vacation* opened up an amazing vista of puzzling that I'd not been aware of before, apart from the wordplay inherent in cryptic crosswords. I even found the courage to write to Borgmann telling him how much I appreciated the books. I didn't expect to get a response from him, but instead I got a welcoming and encouraging response. He told me that he was about to become the editor of a new word puzzle magazine, *Word Ways*. He suggested I might like to submit various items. Just in time, early 1968, I signed up for the very first issue (and haven't missed a single issue since then.)

The combination of Borgmann's books, *Word Ways* and a continuing stream of correspondence with Borgmann, helped to ignite and sustain my word-puzzling activities and my submitting material for *Word Ways*.

Two years later, Ross Eckler took over the ownership and editorship of *Word Ways*. I think I had probably swapped a couple of letters with Ross during Borgmann's two-year editorship, but now Ross was the main man. Even in the first edition under his editorship-ownership (February 1970), Ross ran an article of mine, *Word Chains*. Over the following years, Ross and I swapped many letters, with him suggesting new avenues of word-related activity for me. I continued to generate articles for *Word Ways*, and - over the years - have become one of the most prolific of *Word Ways* authors. I've counted over 200 articles under my name, plus some *Kickshaws* columns, and various offerings in *Colloquy*. My thanks to Ross for allowing these to see the light of day.

Along the way, Ross published several books containing material culled from *Word Ways* (*Word Recreations*, *Names and Games*, *Making the Alphabet Dance*). I was more than pleased that Ross managed to include some of my material from earlier editions of *Word Ways*.

Though it was Borgmann who jump-started my interest in logology, it was Ross who helped keep it running it over the following decades, with both encouragement and the provision of an outlet for my many articles. So, a huge, huge thank you, Ross.

I recall enjoyable meetings with Ross and Faith at least twice when they were holidaying in London, in the 1970s. And I visited them at their home in Morristown, New Jersey, during a trip to New York in 1981. I think they were the only times that I met with Ross and Faith.

And now, here we are, five decades on – Ross has left us, and *Word Ways* is seeing its final paper edition in November 2017. As *Word Ways* progresses to being an online-only publication, I hope that this means that it will not be limited to the 80 pages that the recent paper editions have been, and that it will attract a much larger audience, in view of its being freely available.

