

Your Which?



This is the last in a series of articles on long-serving members of Which? that we have published to celebrate our 50th anniversary



Alick and Bet Smithers with daughter Rebecca

Many of our members have not only supported us for 50 years, they have also passed their passion for consumer rights to a new generation.

Alick Smithers and his wife, Bet, were looking for advice on furnishing their home when he became a member. He told us: 'It seemed to me that the kind of questioning you did on consumer goods was an aspect of retailing that had been neglected for too long.'

The interest in consumer issues has clearly passed to their children. One of their sons, Andrew, used to design packaging for kettles, toasters and cleaners, while their daughter, Rebecca, is *The Guardian's* consumer affairs correspondent.

Rebecca said that *Which?* has played a major role in her understanding of consumer rights. 'I grew up in a household where

Which? was always around. My father would never consider buying a kettle, toaster or vacuum cleaner without consulting what he considered to be his bible.'

In furnishing her first flat, she used dad's neatly filed collection of *Which?* magazines for advice.

Mr Smithers, now 81, said: 'As we have gone through life, we have found that on the whole *Which?* has kept pace surprisingly well with the needs of readers.'

He has been pleased with most Best Buys, a rare disappointment being a dishwasher we said would be quiet but proved to be the opposite.

The couple are hoping for better things from their latest Best Buy. They recently moved into a retirement home and insisted on having a *Which?* Best Buy Bosch dishwasher installed.

Not-so charitable Christmas cards



Which? Chief Executive Peter Vicary-Smith on charity Christmas cards

Christmas is known as the season of goodwill and for many of us, this includes buying charity Christmas cards. These are big business – nearly 2 billion are sent each year.

Many of us buy them for altruistic reasons, but as little as 4 per cent of the price goes to the good cause, depending on where you buy the cards.

As our story on p4 shows, the packet has to say how much of the price goes to charity, but there are huge variations in what charities receive. Even if they do get the suggested 10 per cent minimum, 90 per cent goes elsewhere, so it's the shop rather than the charity that is doing rather nicely.

Charities are reluctant to complain, as these deals give 'money for nothing' and much-needed exposure. But while the income is not critical to large charities, it can be for smaller ones.

It may be easier to buy charity cards from your usual shops but if you really want to make a difference, buy directly from the charity or its own shops, and always read the small print. Merry Christmas.

Peter Vicary-Smith was formerly Head of Appeals at Oxfam and Director of Fundraising at Cancer Research UK. He's a member of the Fundraising Standards Board, which regulates fundraising in the UK.

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