

A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF

Anita Ford

2nd June 1948 – 26th August 2018



Tuesday 25th September 2018

**Greenacres Chiltern
Burial and Ceremonial Park**

Humanist Celebrant: Rosemary Taylorson
07946 465 701 rosemary.taylorson@gmail.com
www.rosemaryceremonies.co.uk
Accredited by Humanists UK
www.humanism.org.uk

Green Endings
141 Fortress Road
London
NW5 2HR
020 7424 0345

Anita's Life

Anita Ford (1948 - 2018) was born in Enfield, then part of Middlesex. Her family originated from a mining community in the Welsh Valleys and she was the first of the extended family to take advantage of the increasing availability of university education. She studied sculpture at Loughborough where she obtained an honours degree which was followed by a one-year scholarship to study fine art at the Venice Academia. However, it was not long before her artistic interest moved to etching and screen printing, skills which she acquired at the Camden Institute in London. Over the following years she set up print studios in Verona and Bologna and also taught the subject back in this country. Anita showed her work at many major exhibitions, both in the UK and internationally, several of which took place in London's West End. She also sold corporately through half a dozen or so agents. Although a lecturer, her teaching was never allowed to interfere with her commitment to her art to which she was fully dedicated.

During her period teaching at the Camden Institute she made many life-long friends with other artists, including Alfred Hockett. They ultimately became partners in 1992 spending twenty six happy and eventful years together. Seven of these were spent on their small sailing cutter 'Reveller' travelling around the coasts of France, Spain and Portugal. Anita's cancer was diagnosed whilst they were on holiday in Japan, which on two previous occasions she had visited in connection with her work. They were married in 2016 and her final exhibition was one which they shared together, 'Hidden Messages' in the Menier Gallery in London in 2018. Both are only children and without progeny.

Life and Pleasures of Anita Ford: Artist

Anita would have liked more time, but she lived her life to the full, enjoying herself and having many happy times with you all, making lasting memories. She made the most of her final two years. A quote from the publicity for her 2017 exhibition reads: 'The cancer changed everything. When you are in a position like me, you don't give a damn about what people think. It is an enormous freedom. This, to be quite honest, is one of the most productive and very happy times of my life'.

Anita chose a short poem by the author Helen Dunmore to be read today. Helen, who died of cancer in 2017, was described as someone 'who remained curious to the last about where she was heading and how she was going to get there'. This could describe Anita who filled her final time with an outpouring of art and an exhibition, and a bucket list of experiences involving her friendships and music and time with Alfred. She said she really related to this poem by Helen Dunmore:

My life's stem was cut
From *Inside the Wave*, Helen Dunmore

My life's stem was cut,
But quickly, lovingly
I was lifted up,
I heard the rush of the tap
And I was set in water
In the blue vase, beautiful
In lip and curve,
And here I am
Opening one petal
As the tea cools.
I wait while the sun moves
And the bees finish their dancing,
I know I am dying
But why not keep flowering
As long as I can
From my cut stem?

Tribute by Alfred Hockett

Anita was my partner for over 26 years. We were both very independent individuals when we met, and perhaps a trifle stubborn, so there were a few sharp edges to smooth off before our relationship could bloom, but this applies to most couples. During our early years together we both kept our individual homes. It was an arrangement that was mutually acceptable, a country cottage in the Cotswolds and a London town house. Who could ask for more. We were perhaps inspired to some extent by the blue and red houses of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, but not so much their relationship. This arrangement continued for around 10 years, but in 2002 this all changed. I bought 'Reveller'.

She was a 30ft cutter rigged sailing boat. A Vancouver, which were known affectionately as the “armchair of the seas”. This was just as well. Anita was taken aback if not horrified, but if I was going to be so rash as to risk my life in a sailing boat let it be a safe one, and then being Anita she just took on a new challenge. She enrolled on an all-female sailing course for competent crew. No cheating here, no men to jump up and say “Here lovey, let me take that for you”. There she was, at the bows in a choppy sea, crying but nevertheless changing the headsail for a smaller one. This was Anita, sheer dogged determination.

She told me of a similar situation when she undertook est training in the States. On attempting a Tyrollean traverse over a canyon she launched herself from the top of the precipice without sufficient confidence, and got stuck in the middle. She told me she cried had tantrums and refused to move. It was only when a guy, also on the course called, I believe Big John shouted out, “Come on Nita, it’s only you that is going to get you out of there!” And she laboriously hauled herself up to the opposite cliff top.

There were too many occasions like this to mention, but perhaps I should mention one sailing episode. This occurred on our final voyage which was a four day passage from La Coruna in Spain to Falmouth. On the second day we were about 150 miles out from land on the edge of the Bay of Biscay when our generator failed. In a matter of minutes all our electrics collapsed, first our radar and finally our navigation lights. What did Anita do? No panic. She fished out our powerful electric lantern, and carefully cutting out sections of red green and white carrier bags turned it into a tricolour warning light. It was later the following night when relieving me on watch when she saw the enormous tanker looming up at our stern. Before I had a chance to say that the ship had acknowledged our presence she had switched on our improvised lantern. Promptly the tanker turned on all his deck lights and shone a powerful spotlight on to us. He had seen us. Ultimately we did get our power back and arrived safely in Falmouth, not that we witnessed much of our landfall as we arrived in thick fog.

I felt honoured to be able to care for Anita in her last days - to become involved in the minutiae of what is the process of living. You will no doubt notice that in this ceremony there is only one picture depicting her. This was her choice. Near the end she said to me, "I am my art: without my art I do not exist." This was true since as soon as she was unable to make even the small talisman her demise was rapid. Her attitude to her cancer was to know and understand it; to immerse herself in it to the extent that in her final decline she managed to even turn her poo chart into a virtual art work.

So she is gone. For me, as for many, she is irreplaceable. I can only count my fortune in having had so many rich and happy years with her and a mass of memories to cherish.

Ingrid

I first met Anita in the 70's when she enrolled in one of my screen printing classes at Camden Institute. I was soon struck by her passion and ambition and the tenacity she showed in reaching her goals. After a few sessions in class she realised that this was a medium she loved, that had huge potential for expression and importantly might enable her to become more self-sufficient as an artist.

All of the classes had waiting lists so Anita added her name to every one. In the meantime she would appear with a pleading expression just after the start of other classes to see if I could squeeze her in if someone hadn't turned up, saying she was desperate and how could she wait a whole week to print another colour! I laughed and of course let her come in whenever I could, recognising that she was one of life's true and driven artists. Eventually her tenacity paid off and she was enrolled all week. She soon became a very proficient serigrapher (screen printer) taking over some of my classes when I cut back and selling print works commercially.

We had become firm friends and four of us were sharing a large house together with spare rooms for studios. I have so many memories of those early years but one abiding memory was when Anita hatched a plan (she was always hatching plans!) to take a portfolio of our work, one winter, to sell to galleries across Northern Italy ending up in Venice where she had spent a scholarship year. The trip was fraught with incidents both difficult

and hilarious. However when we arrived in Venice, Anita's ex landlord insisted on getting his gondola out of winter storage to take us on an extended ride for several hours through Venice and along many of the back canals off the beaten track. Such was his delight at seeing her again.

Another occasion that springs to mind was the time we met up in Spain where Reveller was in dry dock. It was after quite a long gap of not having seen her and, as Alfred reminded me, we ended up dancing along the streets of Seville as if time had stood still. Truly magical memories for us both of special moments together.

Anita fought her illness courageously with the same spirit and tenacity she always showed. Understanding her disease and treatment and holding it back for as long as possible enabled her to live life to the full and spend quality time with Alfred and her friends. During the last few weeks while Anita was in hospital, I was fortunate to be able to spend many hours with her when Alfred couldn't. We reminisced, reflected, laughed and cried and tried putting the world to rights. We talked about her and Alfred's wonderful adventurous life together, their deep love for each other and how they had overcome difficulties and differences. I said that I was in awe of her indomitable spirit and what she had achieved and experienced in life and not least since returning from Japan with the diagnosis. She said then and on several other occasions that it was her love of Alfred alone that had enabled her to defy the odds for two years.

Anita and Alfred's relationship worked so well not just because of their love and loyalty but because of their openness, communication skills, respect for each other's individuality, independence, opinions and self-expression. These qualities, together with an amazing sense of humour and spirit of adventure enabled them to live a rich, full life, overcoming challenges and adversity that life and relationships present. I want to pay tribute to Alfred who has been truly wonderful in caring for Anita and making what remained of their life together as happy and fulfilled as is humanly possible, given her devastating diagnosis. No one could have done more.

Caroline

Anita; a truly unique, inspirational, dearly loved and lovely friend. Much in awe of her art practice, I first met Anita as a colleague at Camden Institute and got to know her much better when she moved to Old Sodbury. Over many walks, cups of tea and glasses of wine, we discussed the progress of our artistic practices. We travelled in India developing a love of 'Jaipur blue', and later shared Christmases and mutual weddings.

She brought so much to the relationship; flashes of a mischievous sense of humour, her drive, energy and determination framed by her belief in visualisation, turning negatives into positives, rising to every challenge and conquering her fears – apart perhaps from driving in vertiginous places. Every project she engaged with was committed to wholeheartedly, from opening a B & B, to sailing, to making jewellery items, to periodically reinventing her art practice, and going for her final big show. Adieu Anita
Love to all.

Dori

It was Anita's idea. She had recently learned to ride and decided that we should do a cross-country jumping course - obviously she had never seen the pictures of Princess Anne falling into the water jump at Badminton....

The owner, Mr. Puddy, had a vague notion of Health and Safety. Of course we all wore hard hats, but he reckoned we would be perfectly safe if he matched the right horse to the right person. As the week progressed the course became significantly more challenging and Anita said she was giving up.

I happened to mention how my skiing confidence improved enormously once after a boozy lunch; so off we went to the local off-licence, and bought a hip flask and a bottle of brandy ... Mr. Puddy was astounded to see Anita's increased prowess the next day and roared with laughter at the solution. However, we both needed Dutch courage on the last morning when we walked the final course. Several of the jumps were higher than us, including one like an empty box that you had to jump into and out of in a couple of strides. We chickened out at that point; whereupon Mr. Puddy bundled us into his Landrover and headed for the pub. After a couple of

double brandies and double Glen Morangies, we sailed over those fences, and for months

afterwards we marvelled at how it made any obstacle that came our way afterwards seem minor in comparison.

I met Anita when I was one of her students at Camden Institute in the mid 70s. As I got to know her better it never failed to amaze me how positive she was – even when times were very bad. Before Anita was diagnosed with cancer she had already had several bouts of bad health, plus, she had to deal with her increasing loss of hearing – a source of major frustration in her life. Who else, other than Anita, could have turned this rotten hand she had been dealt into such powerful pieces of art such as her “black” work, the Spirit Faces and the talismen which were exhibited at The Menier Gallery in London last year?

Anita was a wonderful friend, mentor, and role model, always generous and giving, and open to all possibilities that life threw at her. When she was diagnosed two years ago she sent the following email:

“I have lived more in my 68 years than many people have in 98 (think of the years and adventures on Reveller, the 26 year playtime with Alfred, few responsibilities, the early years of exhibitions, ultimately the West End shows - I've had it all.) It really is a case of 'don't cry for me'. I'm just so grateful for everything that's happened in my life, all the people I've met and my wonderful friends. I've been so privileged. The only person that matters now is Alfred.”

The courageous way she faced her cancer and the premature shortening of her wonderful life was very humbling. Her candour and humour meant that her close friends could be with her and Alfred all of the way. I will miss her beautiful smile and raucous laugh terribly.

Flea

Alfred has asked me to read a letter written by Dale and Chris the oldest of Anita's friends who are unfortunately unable to be with us today.

Dear Alfred

Thank you for your email concerning Anita's funeral. We were terribly disappointed to read the date as we will be unable to be there as we will be in Greece. Gutted to be frank! I had presumed that the funeral would be in the next couple of weeks, but I am aware that these things require much organisation.

Anita has constantly been in our thoughts over the last few weeks and months, particularly so in the last week. It's difficult to reconcile that we won't see her again. However we certainly won't ever forget her and feel thankful to have had her in our lives. Dale is probably one of her oldest friends after meeting her in Loughborough in 1966 when they were both studying fine art. He remembers her as very hardworking despite the emotional turmoil of losing her mother to cancer. She was certainly a colourful and determined personality. She once organised a party when all the food was dyed black! We later lost touch with her for a few years - of course she had been in Italy, and was teaching in Camden when we met up again.

She was now living at Turnpike Lane, in a small flat where we stayed on several occasions. Around this time she had a scare with a suspected cancer in her throat, which turned out to be cat scratch fever! Only Anita could have contracted something so ridiculous! But what a relief that was. We stayed in her flat whilst she was in hospital and decorated her bedroom for her return.

We continued to be in touch fairly regularly after this time. When she was in Old Sodbury we saw her more often. She was certainly one of the most determined and driven individuals we have ever met. As you know, everything she ever did she did it with zeal! From knitting (I hope that you still have one of those amazing tea cosies!) to horse riding, jewellery making, ceramics, sailing, learning foreign languages, diesel maintenance (to surprise you!).

Apart from her Art work. When faced with a down turn in the Commercial Art market to earn a living, she adapted her cottage to do B&B, made thousands of pairs of earrings to sell at the Royal Welsh Show (which was not a success - the phrase 'Pearls to swine' someone said to her there.) She later turned some of these earrings into placemats demonstrating her amazing creativity. In fact the only thing that really made her unhappy was when she was not in a position to make her Art as you will remember. But again when faced with adversity she made trips to the British Museum and produced those fabulous drawings.

We will continue to have Anita in our thoughts and will have our own tribute to her on the 25th. Again so sorry we won't be with you; if it's at all possible we would love a copy of any eulogies. Please keep in touch, remember that we will always be delighted to see you, feel free to come and stay with us if you fancy a country break.

Sending much love, Chris and Dale xx

And now my own recollections

Along with all those who knew her and loved her so well, I felt the force of Anita first in 1990, when a mutual friend suggested I go down to Old Sodbury and learn paper-making from her. I was working at St Albans Art College, teaching Textiles, and needing to rekindle my own practice. Three days with Anita did it – I came back inspired - with a new friend - and established paper-making as my art form over the following 15 years. However, my teaching dragged me into deep and troubled waters and we lost touch for a number of years until Caroline (another mutual friend) told me she was moving to St Albans, where I live.

So, another period of friendship developed – again at a time when I was struggling to find my voice as an artist in my own right. My life was totally different from Anita's – a long happy marriage, three daughters, grandchildren, two mothers declining with dementia, an extended family, a long career in teaching – I was public property, no room for a serious art practice. Anita told me different! Never one to give up on anything, as you have heard, she made me her project. We met regularly, took on local Open Studios, started drawing together regularly, and became close. Gradually, we both found our drawing voice – on one occasion she had

been in Wales, and brought back a large dead raven for us to draw. It was summer, and hot, and the bird was rotting and rank by the time we got together, but we spent three or four hours on it anyway. It was one of my strongest drawings – a strange mix of cowed yet defiant – and hers were extraordinarily powerful.

Another time we drew ourselves, self – portraits, and hers were giving her trouble, she drew herself as old, lined, with stricken eyes, but it was her. So after I left, she decided to continue and did a full length portrait, naked. It was extraordinary, very unsettling, and when she discovered it in her last months we were both struck in how much it foresaw her future decline. Through art, I began to break through my hesitance, and she was with me every step, encouraging, challenging and setting me on a path. I owe her so much, and am only now beginning to realise just how much I will miss her.

I feel privileged to have been her 'local' friend, living five minutes away and able to sustain a very open, honest relationship even as she declined. I provided a sense of family, something of a sister, or a mother, or even a daughter, all relationships we both valued, and perhaps needed.

Watching her fight her illness, constantly investigating and defying it, challenging herself in the knowledge that ultimately it would win is something I will hold onto as an inspiration for my own life Thank you, my extraordinary friend.

Winifred

When I first met Anita through Alfred, we bonded immediately as two “up for it” sailing spouses. We both learnt to sail later in life, when our other halves decided that sailing was their thing. It was a case of “if you can't beat them, you join them”. Naturally, Anita and I traded war stories. Each sailing trip had its highs and lows - they can glorify or blot one's log book.

Anita's first entry started with a low. During her first flotilla trip with Alfred as skipper – I think it was in Turkey or Greece - and Neil, I believe you were there too – somehow the three of them “broke free” from the rest of the group. When they eventually met up, a concerned group leader took Anita aside and asked her “Do you feel safe with your skipper? We can put you on another boat if you prefer.”

Well, Anita was not put off one bit and things evidently improved after that, as friends Jeff and Jane can testify. Sadly they can't be here today and Alfred has asked me to read you their message:

"Anita sailing stories?! Well..... Waiting by the riverside near the Deux Maggot restaurant in France, Anita appeared with that joyful smile, announcing that Jeff was her first ever inflatable dinghy passenger and proceeded to row him (no engine) across one of France's mightiest rivers. A nerve wrecking experience for Jeff, but one that showed Anita as a force not to be trifled with! Crossing the Bay of Biscay in Alfred's boat Reveller, a mightily tearful Anita rushed to the stern crying "My bloody hormones"! I read that as one of Anita's low points..... The next episode takes us to sailing dreamily in the West Indies when Anita declared "our dinghy is missing". Luckily, she spotted the dinghy in the distance. A mad chase ensued with the crew using all their sailing skills and the dinghy was retrieved. In the best naval tradition, there was much drinking of the Chairman's Selection rum at the Friday Night Jump Up on St Lucia. I told Anita that in the British Virgin Islands, they serve a lethal rum cocktail called The Painkiller – she really liked the sound of that!

Provisioning on a long sailing trip is a skill that is perfected over time. Anita's creativity with tins of tomatoes is legendary – it probably explains why she managed to trade 23 spare tins of tomatoes for other goodies with the Caribbean boat boys!"

What wonderful memories! Jeff and Jane are thinking of you today Alfred and missing Anita, her company, hearing her take on life, the universe and everything.

If I may, I would just like to add one more story that Anita told me. Alfred and Anita were sailing in Portugal one year. They took Reveller down the coast from Figueira de Foz back to their base in Nazare. It was a lovely sunny day, but the wind was fresh. Suddenly, the back stay, which is the rear rope supporting the mast, parted. Not only that, Alfred had an attack of seasickness at the same time and was retching over the side, momentarily incapacitated. What did Anita do? Well of course she took over. She had the presence of mind to turn the boat around into the wind, so that the mast was supported from the front of the boat and headed straight back to Figueria de Foz, where there was an excellent boat yard

for repairs. Anita was most disappointed when Alfred revived shortly after her manoeuvre. For a moment, she had seized power (and definitely glory for the log book!) – A dangerous lady according to Alfred, but a clever and brave lady to me. That's how I will remember her.

Alfred

We polish and clean, till everything is sweet and tidy, when we live in a world that is anything but; in fact is often challenging and dangerous. We have few occasions like this when we can look through the mirror and have an opportunity to express ourselves before our friends and peers, to expose our feelings.

This is an opportunity to create a ritual. It is an interesting coincidence that only recently Grayson Perry spoke about this in his excellent series on *Birth, Coming of Age and Death*. I mention this programme as it is also important in that it helps to mark this event as an act in a position of time.

So I stand here not versed in speech or acting, with an opportunity. Like the choir I can only sing this once.

I have to gain strength from thinking of Anita all those years ago, before I knew her. When she was young and talented but lacking in confidence and worldliness. She was standing on a stage before an audience of about two hundred people, the conclusion of a course of training called est, then very fashionable, very American.

She had just witnessed another young woman play a rendition of a Bach Partita on her violin. She had to perform it about half a dozen times to the extent that she was close to a break down point before the course leader was satisfied. Anita stood there. What could she do? She could not sing, play an instrument. She could hardly create a picture which was her true talent, but she had a thing, some might say a weakness for Elvis Presley. So she read the words of *Heart Break Hotel* and boy did she read it.

I hope that here I have expressed a little of myself as well as my beloved Anita but I will now use another man's words to express so well what I feel.

This is an excerpt from a book that I read a few months ago. It expresses so well my feelings for Anita at this point in my late life, words put together with a written skill far in excess of mine. The book is *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez and these words are at the conclusion of the forth chapter.

Love in the Time of Cholera
by Gabriel García Márquez

And it was just at the time when he needed her most, because he suffered the disadvantage of being ten years ahead of her as he stumbled alone through the mists of old age, with the even greater disadvantage of being a man and weaker than she was.

In the end they knew each so well that by the time that they had been married for thirty years they were like a single divided being, and they felt uncomfortable at the frequency with which they guessed each other's thoughts without intending to, or to the ridiculous accident of one of them anticipating in public what the other was going to say. Together they had overcome the daily incomprehension, the instantaneous hatred, the reciprocal nastiness and fabulous flashes of glory in the conjugal conspiracy. It was the time when they loved each other best, without hurry or excess, when both were most conscious of and grateful for their incredible victories over adversity. Life would still present them with other mortal trials, of course, but that no longer mattered: they were on the other shore

