

A celebration of life

Elaine Ann Kimber

14th March 1950 – 12th December 2019

Monday, 20th January 2020

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

I did not have the pleasure of meeting Elaine, but I did meet with her family, who told me a little of her life and the type of person she was.

Elaine Ann Ashby was born in Leicester and was the middle child, growing up with older sister, Gillian, and younger brother, David. Elaine always spoke of happy childhood memories, but there was hardship for the family. Her father died when she was only nine years' old. Her mother Jean showed tremendous strength and resilience, returning to work to support her three children, receiving invaluable help from her mother, Grandma Newcombe, and her sister, Aunt Lil.

Together they shared the qualities that earn women the title of Matriarch, commanding authority and respect but showing love, kindness, and care. Elaine inherited these qualities in abundance, and they are already becoming apparent in Elaine's grand-daughters, Charlotte and Freyja. No doubt, their baby brother, Joseph, will one day benefit from having two older indomitable women in his life. Sadly, Elaine's sister Gill died far too young at the age of forty, but she too had the same strengths and qualities that we can see reflected in her children and grandchildren today.

When Jean met her second husband, Arthur, the family grew again to include Arthur's two sons, Roger and Barry. In later years, Arthur used to say Elaine became a daughter he never had.

Elaine took great pride in her family. Although living apart, holidays were time for family get-togethers. Some of her happiest memories were of three generations of the family enjoying time together on caravan holidays, mostly at Wells, but also further afield, including France and Spain. Elaine was close to her brother David and his wife, Alison, and really enjoyed their regular get-togethers. These usually included a glass or two of red wine, lots of reminiscing and laughter, and, of course, family updates. Elaine was an immensely proud auntie to her nieces and nephew and their families. She was interested and encouraging in their pursuits and revelled in their successes.

Elaine grew up an academic, creative, and sporty child. At school she excelled in all subjects and developed a real aptitude for art and crafts. This enthusiasm and talent was shared in the family, with Elaine's encouragement.

Elaine's sporting prowess was probably inherited from her mother. She didn't realise this until one particular day when she was a young girl. Having been particularly naughty, Elaine decided to run away from Jean and sprinted off, only to find her mother could easily catch her, proceeding to admonish her in full view of all the neighbours!

Elaine's PE teacher, Janet, and her husband, John, were big influences on her. They saw Elaine's enthusiasm and potential, and encouraged her in every way they could in all activities, most notably athletics and canoeing. Their mentoring saw Elaine's talents for sport go from strength to strength. The bond between Elaine, Janet and John endured for many years, with regular annual get-togethers.

Elaine's love for sport set the scene for her future. She began as a talented hurdler, moving to discuss throwing following problems with her knees. She represented Leicester Schools in national events, and it was no surprise when she decided to train to become a PE teacher, which involved moving to Bedford. On completion of the course, Elaine accepted a job as a PE teacher at Long Stratton High School. Her original plan was to work there for about three years, and then move on.

Thirty-nine years later Elaine retired from Long Stratton, having worked there for all of her teaching career, making lifelong friends, including her 'bestie', Chris Abel. Although her first love always remained PE, Elaine's role developed into classroom teaching and pastoral roles. She became a

mentor and supporter of junior staff, and also took on the role of Acting Assistant Head at various times until she retired in 2009.

I know that we have some of Elaine's former colleagues and students here today, and her family were so pleased to read in some of the cards they received how supported and encouraged many of you felt having Elaine as your teacher. Some of them went on to represent English school teams in National competitions. This philosophy of support and encouragement has been a theme throughout Elaine's life. Her teaching day did not end with the bell or the end of term, but included extra-curricular activities and regular school trips. Elaine was someone who worked to make others happy.

Of course, alongside her career, Elaine also had a personal life. Her marriage to Glenn Rooke gave her two precious sons: Ben, born in 1977, and Tom, born in 1980. Elaine was a supportive Mum, encouraging the boys to read, to learn, and to try any activity they might be interested in. Whilst competition was encouraged, enjoyment was always the most important factor. She encouraged them to be independent and facilitated this wherever possible.

Having their Mum as a teacher at their school could have been awkward for Ben and Tom, and indeed may have been if it weren't for her personality. They were given every opportunity, but were shown no favouritism, Elaine was a loving Mum, who needed to be resourceful when she was working and also bringing up her two sons. Ben and Tom knew that they could always approach their Mum with any problem; that they would be encouraged to discuss it with her and helped to come to their own conclusion, going away knowing that Elaine had truly listened and helped.

Elaine was a keen traveller, and enjoyed exploring the United Kingdom, Europe, and beyond. One of her greatest achievements was travelling to Nepal to visit a former colleague – no small feat considering her dislike of flying!

In 1997, Ben introduced Sue, his future wife, to Elaine. Elaine embraced Sue into the family with open arms. Elaine wasn't a stereotypical mother-in-law, always encouraging and supportive and treating her like a true daughter.

And there was someone else in Elaine's life who, having first met each other as teachers at Long Stratton many years before, came back into her life in the year 2000. Elaine and Nigel had hardly seen each other for twelve years until they both attended a retirement party for the school's Deputy Head. This meeting led to Nigel giving Elaine a lift home and the two of them talking until 3am. Elaine then invited Nigel to a dinner party, and the relationship went from strength to strength.

Initially, neither Elaine nor Nigel was particularly interested in marriage, but, as we all know, it is a woman's prerogative to change her mind. So on New Years' Eve in 2009, a mutual friend suggested to Nigel that he might want to reconsider proposing to Elaine as he may be surprised by her response. A couple of days later, at their lovely home in Norwich, Nigel went down on one knee and asked Elaine to marry him. Her response of giggling was thankfully accompanied by a resounding "Yes!", and Elaine married her soulmate that summer at Norwich Registry Office.

They celebrated their marriage that October with a three-week road-trip to America, where they shared the driving, covering three thousand miles, and visited places throughout California and Arizona, including the Grand Canyon, Yosemite National Park, and San Francisco, before driving the coastal highway to Los Angeles.

Their lives together were happy, filled with laughter and teasing and jokes. They spent time together in the garden, with Elaine in charge of the real gardening and Nigel doing the "weeding".

She used her gardening skills and love of hard work to transform and maintain Ben and Sue's garden, too. Elaine and Nigel enjoyed holidays in their caravan, to places like West Runton, Kessingland, and Sandringham, and, further afield, to Northumberland – one of Elaine's favourite places.

Elaine's relationship with Nigel meant she became a sister-in-law to Lyn and aunt to Simon and Sarah and their families, all of whom welcomed Elaine into the family, and Elaine welcomed them into hers.

Elaine and Nigel were delighted to become grandparents, and were very involved in the lives of Charlotte, Freyja, and Joseph. Trips in the caravan became fewer, because it meant too long a gap in seeing the children. Elaine and Nigel looked after Charlotte twice a week from when she was ten months' old, when Sue returned to work. Ben and Sue know that Elaine and Nigel would do anything for these children. The ripples from Elaine will carry on in this generation and in generations to come.

Sport was always central to Elaine's life. She played hockey for Harleston Magpies, and also ran Bunwell Hockey Club with her friend Barbara. She was introduced to golf by Nigel and never looked back, even becoming club champion. She was Ladies Captain in 2006 and 2018, and her encouragement of others, including junior players, meant that there are people still playing golf today because of Elaine, including her son Tom.

And so we move on to consider the last eighteen months of Elaine's life following her diagnosis. As with any problem that arose Elaine faced each part of treatment with her usual strength, determination, and humour. Humour was a large part of who Elaine was. She didn't take herself too seriously, and always loved a laugh.

When Elaine knew that she was not going to get well she began to write thoughts and instructions in a small notebook. She has asked that her ashes be scattered between Wells and Holkham, and has chosen a route that will require Tom to walk a longer distance than he would like, in memory of the same walk they did when he was younger and he moaned all the way there and all the way back.

She has also referenced her reputation as a terrible singer with a memory of a family funeral where she reduced everyone to barely suppressed giggles when she belted out Abide With Me completely out of tune, and has suggested that it should probably not be sung today.

Elaine remained positive and was intensely irritated when her treatment got in the way of her living her life. Her frequent trips and stays in the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital led to her developing a warm relationship with many of the staff. Elaine's family want to thank all those involved in her care during these times, the staff on Colney, Weybourne, Mulbarton, and, particularly, Mattishall Wards.

Elaine died peacefully on 12th December 2019, in hospital with Nigel, Ben, Tom, and Sue by her side. And that is something to be thankful for, and to celebrate.

Jen's Tribute

Our much loved Elaine, how do I even begin to describe,

How lucky we all feel to have been one of your tribe.

I want to encourage everyone here to go back in time,

And think of your own great memories, but maybe let's start with some of mine.

A twinkle in her eye - Elaine, that's how we'll think of you.
I'll go back to the happy times when we got together for a bit of a do.
Years ago, sneaking out the back door,
Oh I wonder, whatever for?
That knowing mischievous grin,
We all had no doubt where she (and often my mum!) had been.
I might not have told her but it will always be true,
If I ever ran away from home she'd be the one I called and said
"Elaine, I'm coming to you"
There's nothing I could've said or done, that would make her turn me away.
She was pretty great like that. No judgement, in your corner, come what may.
It tickles me that you used to hate us calling you "auntie"
It could never cramp your style, we all know you loved to party.
At your 50th I got on stage to lead the Macarena,
And we danced all night without a single breather.
I did hear something later about a disco nap,
A vicious rumour - maybe we'll forget that.
When my favourite uncle asked you to become his Mrs Kimber,
All of us girls gathered to give you a hen to remember.
One thing's for sure, we are all diabolical singers,
But in that karaoke room, we all felt like absolute winners.
The song of the night was "We are family",
Whenever I hear that song now, I'll know I've still got you with me.
Our time with you on this earth I will always treasure,
Your wicked laugh, your love for us all beyond measure.
It goes without saying you will be desperately missed,
Your spirit and joy in life, I could carry on this list.
But whenever I need a boost all I have to do,
Is remember you saying "go on gal"
Our wonderful Elaine, forever we'll remember you.