

# A celebration of life

# Madeleine Spears

3 November 1945 – 17 December 2019

9.30 am, 30 December 2019, Taunton Deane Crematorium  
and  
12 noon, Neroche Hall, Bickenhall

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

# Madeleine Spears

3<sup>rd</sup> November 1945 – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019

## Tributes to Madeleine

(Celebrant) The stand-out aspects of Madeleine's character were her energy and capacity for work, and her enthusiasm for life. She was an intelligent woman with a forceful personality, and a determined activist in politics, trades unions and the community. She was also a quite private person and I know that some of you here today have been shocked to hear of her death as, for the most part, she kept her health problems to herself.

Madeleine was born within months of the end of the second world war, on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1945, in Bassaleg, near Newport. Her parents were Brenda Dean and Frank King, a metallurgist who worked in the new aluminium factory nearby. Brenda and Frank had three daughters of which Ruth was the eldest, Geraldine the youngest, and Madeleine in the middle. She was a smart girl who went to the local grammar school where she was to become head girl.

Madeleine went from school to West Ham College of Technology where she studied zoology, marine biology and chemistry. She became politically conscious and active as student during protests about conditions at the college; their march down the High Street in Stratford may have been her first demo. but it was definitely not the last.

As a teacher she was active in trade unionism and the development of local education policy. Paddy and Dalah were fellow lecturers and trades union activists; Paddy has contributed the following list of Madeleine's busy political and educational engagements at the time:

- In the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions she held branch and local elected posts and was delegate to national conference;
- In the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education she was active at all levels: Branch Officer, Liaison Committee to the local authority, Staff Governor, and teacher representative to the local authority;
- Active in the East Anglia region, she was a member of the local advisory panel to the local education authority, conference delegate and member of regional councils including National Executive

Member, Chair of National Education Committee, member of National Women's Rights Committee, NATFHE representative to the TUC, and TUC women's conference, and NATFHE rep to the Royal Society of Arts.

This may be an exhausting, but is not an exhaustive list.

In her concern for students, she volunteered as student counsellor at Hitchin college until a paid post for this was created – for which she agitated. Also at Hitchin College, she campaigned for a crèche for childcare of which she herself was in pressing need. At one point she had two children under 14 months of age.

Here is Madeleine's daughter Judy, to pay tribute to her mother.



## **Words from Judy and Tim**

My earliest memories of mum were on a march. I must have been fairly young as I was a toddler and in and out of the buggy. I vividly remember passing Downing Street shouting at the top of my voice “Maggie Maggie Maggie Out Out Out!!!”

I always thought that mum had enough politics for the whole family. A lifelong member of the Labour Party, mum stood 3 times to my knowledge; Once in Stevenage and twice in Taunton. Tim & I would be roped in to do leafleting, and our house in Green Street was often used as a telling centre for the local Labour Party. Where we would come down for breakfast to find the local MP's reading the papers, memorably Barbara with Ken Follet.

Mum stood up for Women's rights and wherever she was, made sure that provisions were made for care of children so that she could pursue not only her career as a further education lecturer but also her political beliefs. Ensuring future generations had these facilities in place. She was also an antiapartheid supporter and staunchly opposed racism in any shape or form.

Dinner parties and Barbeques were the norm in our house; mum would spend hours making everything from scratch. The food was so good, using only the best ingredients it was hard to leave any. Mum had friends of all different ages and some of our friends became hers and vice versa.

We also travelled all over the UK not only to Mum's conferences but also Landsailing with dad, however on one occasion we were on the Norfolk Broads, on a Broads Cruiser, Mum had just finished showering and had come out to hang her towel on the back of the door when she lost her footing...splash! Overboard mum went. Apparently dad recalled me saying..."Don't worry she'll come up in a second" and thankfully she did...not very amused, which made us laugh even harder. Poor mum.

Culture was high on mums' agenda for Tim and me to experience. We went to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival several times to visit the Tattoo and see Shakespeare's -A Mid Summer nights Dream or Jack in the Beanstalk, where mum thought it was hilarious to see me hide under my seat when the giant's shadow appeared on stage booming Fee Fi Fo Thumb! We visited France extensively along with friends over the years and had some amazing times. Mum took us to art galleries to see first-hand the amazing sculptures and paintings.

Mum was one of the people behind using Fairland's Valley Farmhouse for use by Digswell Arts Trust. This facility was where local artists could have affordable spaces to create their work. I remember helping mum to clear the farmhouse for the first artists to come and use it. Little did I know at the time that this would be the place where I later found lifelong friends and would go on to have a studio space of my own.

Mum inspired people, guiding many in their careers. She seemed to have a knack of understanding other people's strengths honing in on what made them tick and suggesting they pursue that avenue of learning; lots of them becoming leaders in their field.

Work was a large part of Mum's life as the main breadwinner as Dad's creative and inventive work seemed to be feast or famine. After 20 years teaching further education Mum decided to join Dad's business the Production Company- Science Pictures Ltd. I joined them when I was a student and alongside Lucy worked for Science Footage to help create and run their library branch of the business.

However before this Dad ran Science Pictures from home using one of our living rooms as a studio and a bedroom as a microscopy room. Giving rise to another memorable moment when we arrived at home from a holiday and snails could be found climbing the walls eating the wallpaper in the living room. "Enough!" mum announced, and dad had to find other premises to continue his specialist filming.

I remember how devastated mum was when I ended up with aggravated depression as a late teenager. I had come out of a long-term relationship and had been burning the candle at both ends, not sleeping or eating. (Basically punishing myself for upsetting another human being). Mum blamed herself, but she hadn't done anything wrong.

Yet how proud she was when I got my BA (Hons), but maybe a piece of mum was in me as I was not satisfied with the result. I was determined to do better. I enrolled to do my MA and I have never really seen mum cry until she was at my MA show which I had curated and she told me how proud she was of me. Only to be topped by being part of a team at Chelsea Flower Show where we gained a gold medal (I had produced the sculpture).

Tim of course achieved fame when he became World Champion at Landyachting in Argentina, and approval when he got her tickets to whatever band she so desired to see. Including Glastonbury where she and I danced into the night to Ray Davies' Waterloo Sunset formally from the Kinks.

Mum was never usually a one for out and out affection, never really telling us how much she loved us until quite recently. Mum was a very private person, Dad and she had very independent lives. Mum could be very stubborn at times and near the end of her life this could be a little stressful and upsetting, Mum didn't want to be a burden or want any "fuss", so kept her medical conditions close to her chest. Mum knew that she had created two very busy work driven children who were excelling in their careers as self-employed businesses. Mum had thought "You have enough to deal with", possibly not knowing that she was pivotal in all we did and who we'd become.



(Celebrant) After 20 years of teaching and lecturing, Madeleine retired from the profession and worked to support David's growing business in microscopy and the production of educational science programmes. Here is their colleague Sajjad, to tell us about Madeleine's life during those busy but rewarding times, and to pay his own tribute.



## Words from Sajjad

### Hello

My name is Sajjad, and I work as a Producer at the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol. I work in what's known as Development. The place where new ideas begin. It's a magical way to earn a living: telling stories about the natural world, working with the finest film makers and deciding where to send them next, on what strange new adventure.

Who knew there was such a job? Doing nothing other than dreaming up strange new narratives and wrapping them up with a shape and structure that can keep viewers on the edge of their seats?

It's no stretch to say I owe my career to David and Madeleine Spears.

They invited me to join their production company – Science Pictures – as a researcher 25 years ago straight out of university. I loved everything about life at 29 Bridge Street: a complete warren – and a second home for everyone who worked there. The people were amazing: some of the finest, smartest, and sometimes tipsiest (I remember some amazing house parties), people I've ever met - all working for David and Madeleine.

Tracy Gow, Richard Taunton, Tim Platten, Khaled Manzoor, Steve Root, Keith Ribbons, Gun Esplin, Heather Morgan, Chris Balmer, Derek Hall, Mike Webb, Rachel Scarrot, Clare Burns, Dan Glu – all send their love.

### Into battle

I'm proud to say that Madeleine taught me the basics of TV production,

She was many things:

Biologist

Producer

Teacher

Matriarch – looking after her herd

And catalyst.

The Madeleine I knew was absolutely transformative: she made things happen.

### Lifblood

For a young, wet-nosed Researcher, working with Madeleine – heading into battle with her to Channel Four or the BBC – was an amazing learning curve. Just watching her work her magic was priceless.

In one meeting with one of Channel 4's Educational Officers – we discussed a recently commissioned half hour film about the human heartbeat. The commissioning editor loved the idea – and there was money on the table to make it, but we still needed to agree much of the educational content. The educational officer attached to the project was concerned – he wanted to know how we were going to pull off the exciting, but costly, and hard-to-film visuals. He asked us how we were planning to show a beating heart, watching scenes of open heart-surgery was old and tired – a rehash of what had always gone before. And it was just illustrating textbook pictures. Madeleine had the perfect reply. We didn't need to see scenes of surgery to explain the delicate power of a heart. We would use state-of-the-art 3D animation software, powerful render engines and a slate of special effects to project a beating heart onto any surface we liked. Bringing lavish photography, sparing and simple narration.

She said we had the team, the talent and the technology.

The educational officer was amazed.

He said, well, that sounds great but how the hell are you going to deliver all that on a schools budget?

Madeleine looked at me. And I looked at her. Then the Educational Officer looked at me....

Then Madeleine leaned forward.

Well, sitting about 20ft away from this fellow is one of the brightest young 3D animators in the business.

Downstairs in our own purpose-built studios we have a team of camera operators who film and deliver the impossible to a list of global broadcasters (who come to us because we deliver).

And...

...we have one thing that no fancy production house, no film studio, not the entire BBC or Channel Four has....

“We have,” she said...

What? Asked the educational officer

“We have a Dave!”

Once the meeting was over, Madeleine proclaimed: ‘Right, let's nail some jellies to the wall.’

Like I said. Catalyst.

The Madeleine I knew transformed everything she touched.

### **Light Years Ahead**

Both Madeleine and David were of course light years ahead of their time.

I don't mean the technology. The microscopes, the software and computers running the render engines day and night to bring one frame to life.....

Three seconds after I started working at Science-Pictures I realised David and Madeleine came as a pair. Not that they were married, I mean they literally came as a pair.

If you were looking for either David or Madeleine at work, you would ask, have you seen Dave-and-Mads. Or do you know what time Dave-and-Mads are coming back from their meeting? Dave-and-Mads.

A portmanteau. Two names – one entity.

In many ways they were the Brangelina of their day.

### **Ave Maria**

One of my very fondest memories of David and Madeleine came after our film about the mystery of heart beats was nominated for an RTS award – and to be appreciated by the Royal Television Society was – and still is an honour.

The three of us drove up to Manchester for the awards ceremony to Granada Studios and wandered around the sets of Corrie until we got to our seats. While we didn't win on that occasion, the journey back home to Hitchin was its own prize. While I was sleeping off the long day, I awoke to the sound of angels.

David and Madeleine singing in perfect harmony, in tune with the radio: Ave Maria.

If we had iPhones with fancy cameras back then, I'm pretty sure it would have gone viral.

### **Finish**

We worked on many wonderful films together, and Madeleine was my first Producer.

It came as a shock to learn Madeleine was so ill. I'd been wanting to tell David and Madeleine about my move to the BBC – only putting it off until my house sold. I hope she'd be proud to see what all of us who worked under her wing have gone on to achieve.

It was lovely to come and see MS a few days ago...

I and all the Science Pictures crew I'm still in touch with all take great comfort from knowing how well she was being cared for by her family – and I thank Tim and Judy for being so amazing.

I'll leave you with one final thought.

As Tim Platten, Richard Taunton and I sat around her bed, sharing stories, laughing and giggling, after about 90 minutes or so Dave suggested we get some food (he actually said, let's go to the pub).

Madeleine smiled. She said, but I'm listening to their stories!

As we ended our visit and Tim, Richard and I drove back home had a sudden moment of clarity. At the end of our days we're all just - all of us - stories in the end.

I'm grateful and happy to have been part of Madeleine's. And I look forward to sharing a few more with you all later.



(Celebrant) After they wound up their business, 'Science Pictures', David continued his microscopy work and Madeleine opened up a new seam in her working life. She was appointed regional manager for the RNIB in Birmingham and then Bristol. After another temporary retirement, she worked for Somerset County Council on equality and diversity issues. Following yet another retirement she and David applied themselves to the development of the Big Bang Fair @ Weston, the UK Young Scientists and Engineers Fair. Their first festival, two years ago, attracted 42 exhibitors and 3,000 visitors including many local schoolchildren. The fair was repeated the following year and, now with a fair wind and new volunteers, it will take place again next year.

All the while, Madeleine was active in the Labour Party, as Judy has described. She was up to speed with social media and regularly used Twitter and Facebook, not least to tackle Rebecca Pow about Brexit. Madeleine was an ardent remainer!

She and David knew how to enjoy themselves too. Madeleine was a skilled cook and their dinner parties are legendary. She was no shrinking violet and liked to wear red and purple. She was an avid reader of crime novels and

murder mysteries. Political satire made her laugh and she enjoyed QI and The Last Leg on the TV. She even tried her son Tim's sport – sandyachting – once!

Over the years the family worked its way through most of the incarnations of vintage VW campervans, with France and the Peak District being favourite destinations.

In more recent years Madeleine became very interested in botany and in photographing moss and lichen. She joined the local U3A Geology Group and went with them to visit Iceland. Here is group member Robert Beckinsale to tell us about the group and to pay tribute to Madeleine.



## **Words from Richard Beckinsale**



(Celebrant) Madeleine and David met as students, both studying zoology. In the hospital, I asked Madeleine what attracted her to David all those years ago. “He was interesting”, she replied. Asked the same question a little later, David replied: “She was a bit of a challenge”. But you knew that didn't you – and loved her for it too.

Here is David's tribute to his wife.

## **Words from David**

Mads was the love of my life; for over 51 years she has been my best friend and companion and I can't imagine life without her.

Looking back at her life, one is struck by her devotion to education, equal rights and fair treatment of people who have been devoted to teaching, health care and care of the disabled. At West Ham College of Technology, she was part of a group of students protesting about the grim, third rate conditions of the college. This pressure resulted in big improvements that have eventually led to the college becoming part of the University of East London. She taught a strange variety of students when she lectured science in Further Education Colleges for 20 years. They included butcher apprentices, firemen and trainee nurses to name just three. She became active in NATFE, the union representing FE college

lecturers and attended many national conferences of the union and the TUC. We had two small children at the time (1975 and 1974) and Madeleine didn't drive at the time, struggling with them on the bus to Hitchin College. She established a crèche at the college with Tim and Judy being the first customers.

Mads loved travel and treated herself to her 40th birthday with a tour of China and was struck by the local interest in westerners using local loos; it also marked her leaving FE to work with me at Science Pictures producing science and technology television films mainly for schools. This was an era of great creativity as we built a talented team of camera people, editors and writer/researchers. They have expressed the view that the company was like a happy family rather than a hardnosed commercial operation. Over 300 programmes were made; most of them with Mads acting as producer. Some of the programmes won important awards including from the Royal Television Society, an EU education TV award and a British Medical Association Award for a series on medical immunology.

One of her notable creations was the series Geography in Graphics for BBC Schools which meant Mads toured the English coastline in a helicopter equipped with cameras. She was entertained by the reaction of people when the crew landed at a hotel for an overnight stay and they were asked who the celebrity was. I got scared to death on the same series when filming the Rhine River when a local Dutch pilot got lost in gathering darkness and almost empty fuel tanks. He found the unlit grass runway at the last moment.

Some of the programmes were made for American companies including Encyclopaedia Britannica which is based in Chicago and Discovery Channel, based in Washington DC. Visits there were fascinating and Mads enjoyed off-duty visits to concerts and galleries. We also attended biennial Wildlife Film Festivals at Jackson Hole in Wyoming; Mads particularly enjoyed the spectacular geology of the Rockies as well as the bears, buffalo, moose and chipmunks as we extended our stay for a few extra days.

Mad's driving style was a source of many surprising invectives coming from an upbringing in a family of strict Methodist Conservatives; any innocent overtaker became the target for the rudest of insults.

When Science Pictures closed as a production company in order to concentrate on supplying specialist filming work for other broadcast companies, Mads got a job with the RNIB, firstly running their Birmingham Office and then becoming director for the Western Region. She travelled to Taiwan and other far flung places as part of her duties.

Our children have been a great delight and have achieved successful careers and families of their own despite a few hiccups along the way. They have been hugely supportive during the last few weeks of Mad's life.

I would like to personally thank our friends and neighbours who have been immensely supportive for both of us during the last few difficult months. The list is long but contributions to our wellbeing went far beyond what could have been expected.

Thank you all.

