

A celebration of life

Paula Margaret Varley

16th November 1952 – 20th February 2020

Friday, 6th March 2020 Earlham Crematorium, Norwich.

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

REMEMBERING PAULA

This afternoon, we are remembering Paula through music and family memories. The first piece of music we heard was chosen by Paula's son, Sam. He has a strong emotional connection with the song because it evokes memories of it being played whilst Paula cooked the traditional Sunday dinner. Sam faced these meals with an element of dread; mainly due to his loathing of vegetables when he was a boy. His relationship with vegetables has changed as the years have gone by, but this song always takes him back to his childhood, those Sunday dinners, and green food.

You are all here because Paula meant something to you. Some of your memories will be shared, and others will be personal only to you. But there is one thing you all have in common: at one point or another, in some way or other, your lives have touched the life of Paula.

I did not have the pleasure of meeting Paula but spent time with Roy and Sam, who told me a little of her life and the type of person she was. Paula was adopted when she was just four weeks' old, by Barbara and Eric Wells. Her Mum, Barbara, and her brother, Kevin, are here to say goodbye to Paula today.

Paula's childhood years were spent in Westcliff, where her love of being by the sea began. It led to happy memories of walking on the beach and summer jobs in cafes when she was older. Paula always hoped to live by the sea again, and, whilst this didn't happen, she enjoyed day trips to the coast whenever possible.

She showed herself to be a bright child, who did well academically at Grammar School, with a particular talent for English. This led to her working for an advertising agency in London, and in Europe as a translator for a while. Paula also had an artistic skill for drawing accurate portraits of people.

It was whilst she was working as a barmaid in about 1980 that she first came into contact with Roy Varley, when he was in the area studying. We all know that it takes certain skills to be a good barmaid and Paula had these skills in abundance. She was good at chatting to people and making friends, but she was also a tough cookie who stood no nonsense when customers stepped out of line. She was also able to drink alcohol with no apparent ill-effects, and, in Roy's words, "Could drink him under the table."

Photographs show Paula as a beautiful and vibrant young woman, and Roy was surprised that she would be interested in him in any way. But she clearly was because when Roy returned to Norwich she came to visit him and they became a couple.

They were married on February 26th at Norwich Registry Office. It took some time for Paula to adjust from the fast pace of London life to the slower ways of Norfolk. Apparently, whilst other people ambled slowly up the hill, Paula would speed-walk past them, even though she was in no particular hurry. But, although the change took time, Paula knew that Norwich was a much better and safer place to bring up a family than London would have been.

Having her own family meant everything to Paula. She and Roy had three sons: Jack, Thomas, and Sam. She became involved with the boys' schools, holding the role of parent governor at both Larkman First School and then at Knowland Grove. She had a real ability and wish to help others. Roy remembers Paula at her absolute best, when she was supporting children who had special needs.

Paula loved gardening and would spend hours outside tending to plants, when her health allowed. When forced to slow down as her health deteriorated, she enjoyed listening to music and watching television, with an enthusiasm for gory programmes. Some of them were so gruesome that Roy couldn't bear to watch them.

Paula battled with both her physical and mental health. These challenges made her prefer to spend time at home, where she felt safest. She did enjoy drives out in the car, preferably with a cream tea at a National Trust property somewhere along the way, but eventually preferred to be at home with Roy.

The photographs showing Paula as a vibrant, beautiful woman compare starkly with the anxious, poorly person Sam came to recognise as his Mum. But even with these challenges, Paula would relish their conversations, some of which would be "chatting", but others that would be more intellectual with a philosophical or psychological content. Roy, of course, remembers the young healthy Paula, and says that, even when unwell, the "real" Paula was visible to him.

Paula faced more than her share of sadness and difficulties during her life. Thomas died when he was just a small boy. No parent should have to endure the death of a child, but Paula and Roy dealt with their sadness in the best way they could, and moved forward with their lives.

Also, Jack's estrangement from the family caused Paula great distress. It meant that not only did she miss out on a relationship with her eldest son but also with his wife, Anna, and her grandson Ted. Being a grandparent was something that Paula dearly wished for. Such were her feelings about this situation that it was her wish that Jack and his family should not be here today.

Paula did not give up easily. The feisty barmaid attitude remained strong within her. At one point, it seemed there may have been an opportunity for a lung transplant. Paula embarked on the suggested fitness regime to become fit enough with more enthusiasm and dedication than anyone could have imagined; often pushing herself beyond safe limits in her determination to do everything she could to make a transplant possible.

When it became apparent that Paula was not going to get well, she continued to show strength, and to express how she felt. She wrote that Roy and Sam "mean the world to me". She expressed concern about Roy, and the effect that caring for her had on him. But, care for her he did. He was her primary carer, supported by Sam, who became fully involved in the last few months of Paula's life.

Paula would force herself to remain stimulated and alert by spending hours on her laptop, rather than give in to the fatigue. This fight and determination also showed itself in her wishes to remain at home, not to go into a hospice unless there was no option, and certainly not to go into hospital. And, so it was, with the support of Roy and Sam that Paula was able to die at home in her own bed on 20th February 2020.

We will now pause for a while to listen to the next piece of music. The Julie Driscoll recording of This Wheels On Fire was a particular favourite of Paula's, and it's fair to say that she loved it so much and played it so often that everyone else became thoroughly tired of it. So it says a lot about Roy and Sam that they felt able to listen to this track today! You may wish to use this time to think about Paula and what she meant to you.