

A celebration of life

Lynn Repsis Fraser

7 April 1943 – 9 March 2020

11.30 am, Thursday 2 April 2019, Greenacres Woodland
Burial, Chiltern

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Lynn Repsis was born in St Paul, Minnesota, lived there for about three months, and never returned. Her father was a civil engineer, and before Lynn was a teenager she lived all over the US, from Delaware to Washington State, from South Carolina to Alabama. As a result, she experienced many very different school systems, which she always blamed for her bad handwriting (not that it was that bad), but which also probably taught her flexibility and adaptability.

In the mid-1950s the family moved to, and settled in, Denver Colorado, the “mile-high city” in the foothills of the Rockies, where she went to Junior High School then High School, and she remained close, throughout her life, to a number of friends from that time. She then studied Biology at the University of Colorado in Boulder, where again, she made some enduring friendships.

In 1965, she drove her Dodge Dart, alone, from Denver to New Haven Connecticut (about 2,000 miles), to start a PhD in Biology at Yale University. She had with her in the car a hand-gun that her father had given her for her safety! (We gave it back a few years later!).

In 1968 I went to Yale to do a PhD in Chemistry, having just graduated from Aberdeen University. I had a Fulbright Travel Scholarship and sailed to the US on the SS United States, the fastest liner ever, arriving in New York on 4 Sept 1968. I knew no-one in the US and was at a very vulnerable age! I met Lynn at the International Student House sometime in October 1968. There, each Friday, students from a different country would cook a meal and arrange a programme. That night was a French night, with wine tasting afterwards. Lynn had gone with her two flat-mates, one of whom, a medical student, had just broken off an engagement, and it was felt she “needed to meet people”. In contrast, I had been told if I came along after, with my bagpipes, I might get some free alcohol! During a break between wines I played my pipes, and then Lynn came and chatted with me. At one point the conversation went something like:-

Lynn: How long are you going to be at Yale?

Me: I'm here for three years for a PhD

Lynn: It normally takes four years

Me: But I am a genius

In the event it took me 4 years, and Lynn never let me forget the exchange!!

We started going out together, we drove out to Colorado the following summer where I met her parents and brother, Chuck, and we got married in Battell Chapel, Yale University, on 27 Dec 1969, just after Lynn had completed her PhD.

There were six at the wedding, including ourselves, the minister, and Kerry Kirking, the Best Man, who was a Yale Divinity student, and also a piper. Lynn then spent two years as a post-doctoral research fellow at Yale Medical School, while I finished off my PhD. Her boss was a Dr Morris, who had developed the morning-after pill, and she worked on *in-vitro* fertilisation of rabbits. Then, in October 1970, we sailed to the UK on the QE2, and Lynn started work at the Clinical Research Centre at Northwick Park Hospital. She was now working on *in-vitro* fertilisation of mice (which, apparently, are reproductively much closer to humans!)

Five years later she moved to academia, becoming a lecturer in the Department of Human Biology at Chelsea College, London, which was subsequently annexed by King's College London. She was later promoted to Reader, then in 1993 to Professor of Reproductive Biology. She supervised PhD students, lectured to a

wide variety of students, including Medical Students, as well as continuing her research, which became focused on sperm function – what switches sperm on and what switches sperm off. Some of the students referred to her as “the sperm lady”, which I think she liked.

During her professional life she was author or co-author in over 130 scientific papers, and she was active in a number of scientific societies. She was Chairman of the UK's Society for the Study of Fertility from 1990 - 1993, and from 1999 – 2001 was the eighth Chairman of ESHRE, The European Society of Human Reproduction and Fertility, and its first woman Chairman.

Her professional life led to a lot of foreign travel to Meetings and Conferences, which I could also enjoy. The sperm scientists in particular met up in nice locations every four years and we attended their meetings over the years - at the foot of Mount Fuji in Japan; in Sienna, Italy; in Cairns, Australia; in Montreal; and at El Escorial, outside Madrid. I would tell people I have travelled the world on sperm! She also had four extended visits to Japan where she did further research in the labs of Japanese scientists. I would join her towards the end of these stays. In one such visit, her host scientist took me to one side and said "Your wife is tough..." (because she was working long hours) "...and she doesn't eat much rice" (a contradiction in Japanese eyes)! We are still in contact with these Japanese friends.

Domestically, Lynn loved to cook, and even after a long eleven hour day she would get home from King's College around 7pm, and then spend an hour in the kitchen cooking a meal for the two of us. She found this relaxing. She did not approve of microwave cookers, and we never possessed one, which is something I am currently regretting. I may have to break faith with her on this. She also liked entertaining, from spur of the moment invitations to visiting colleagues from my work, to more elaborate annual American style Thanksgiving Dinners, where we generally managed to squeeze 14 friends around our table. We also ate out a lot (often in conjunction with a theatre visit), and Lynn loved identifying new restaurants to try. She preferred Italian food to French food, as I do, and for each of

the last few years we have celebrated my birthday in Bologna, and Lynn's birthday in Venice. In fact, we were due to fly out to Venice yesterday. And Lynn also liked her wine, and had a remarkable memory for wines she had tried over the years.

When Lynn turned 65 in 2008, she had to retire, and we spent much of the

following 11 years on various holidays. We did a lot of cruising on small ships, typically with about 100 passengers, a number of river cruises, and several cultural trips, including a tour of English Cathedral, gastronomic tours in Italy and Spain, and a tour of the Renaissance Courts of Northern Italy with our friends Brian Harding and Sue Finch.

Even during last year, after Lynn had spent much of 2018 having chemotherapy for Ovarian Cancer, surgery and then more chemotherapy, we managed to visit Venice twice, have a cruise from Monte Carlo to Rome, attend the ESHRE annual conference in Vienna (along with over twelve thousand other attendees), have a week in Norfolk, a trip to Scotland, a cruise up the Mississippi, followed by a week in Colorado visiting old friends including her niece Katie, and a relaxing holiday in Barbados in early December. We then celebrated our Golden Wedding, quietly, in Bath, at the end of December. And in early January we saw a production of "Measure for Measure" in London with Sue Finch, and enjoyed a nice meal after at Clos Maggiore. We then attended a four-day Bridge residential course on card play.

Lynn's last few weeks were difficult, triggered by a bowel obstruction, but she bore it without complaint, and the NHS have been magnificent over the last two years. I did not want her to die alone, and she died peacefully in Watford General Hospital, in no pain, with me holding her hand.

We had a very good 50 years together.

Bill Fraser, 24 March 2020